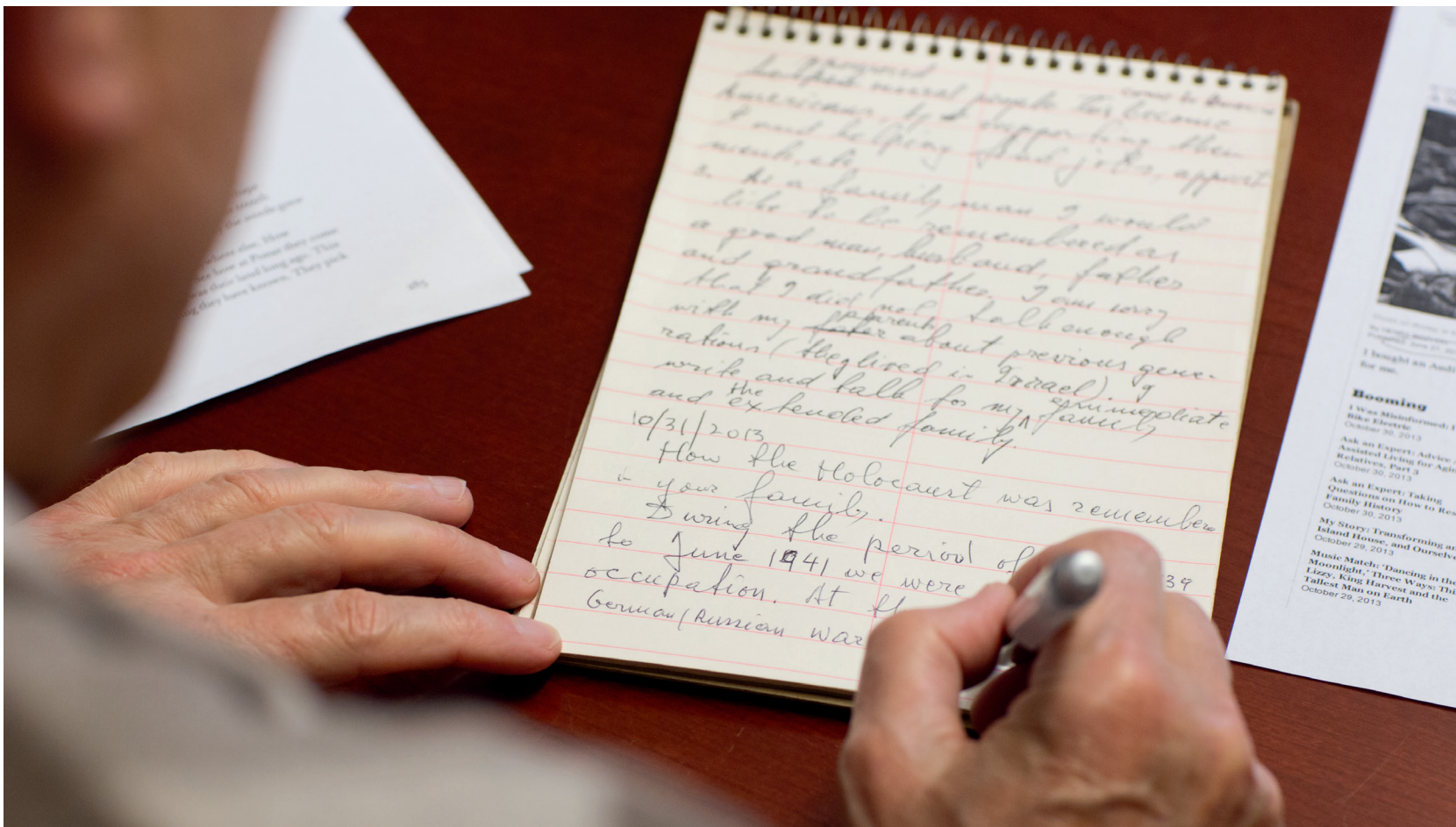


Echoes of Memory

Volume 12

ECHOES OF MEMORY | Volume 12

UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM WASHINGTON, DC



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HOLOCAUST
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Foreword

This 12th volume of *Echoes of Memory* brings together the work of Holocaust survivor writers of The Memory Project, some of whom have now been writing about their lives and memories of the Holocaust for more than a decade, along with new voices from writers who have just begun to chronicle their Holocaust experiences. This might seem surprising that a survivor would choose this moment in time to begin the task of putting memory to paper, of beginning to craft memoir of the Holocaust. The texts compiled here, though, are focused on more than the long experience of witnessing. The work here illustrates the pressing importance the survivors of The Memory Project feel to remember and to memorialize, as well as their clear sense of urgency to connect experiences during the Holocaust to the world we live in now. This collection of work, though written by the last generation of those persecuted during the Holocaust, is squarely focused on the future and portrays the real work of witnessing.

Readers will learn firsthand about the important place the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum holds in the daily life of survivor Susan Warsinger as she recounts her experience of being asked to connect the volunteer work she does as a survivor with her practice of yoga. She is clear in her commitment to continuing her work as a speaker, writer, and tour guide for the Museum, and she draws a direct connection from this work to her yoga routine. She makes us see the ways in which her service to the Museum's mission is enacted in her daily life. She tells us that she works to maintain her agility and flexibility so she can continue to spread her message of action and remembrance. The connection she illustrates demonstrates the ways the survivor writers whose work is compiled here “walk the walk” in order to ensure the world pays attention to the threat of antisemitism and bigotry today.

Also illustrating the vitality of these survivors' writings is Esther Starobin's essay, “Obligation,” in which she considers—through her writing and snippets from her children and grandchildren—her role as the keeper of her family's history and what that means for fulfilling her parents' wishes for a close-knit family. Her questions are influenced by the fact that she has no memory of her parents.

Her personal story becomes at once an example of the ways in which the past impacts the whole identity of a family over time, while making it clear to a reader that the Holocaust is not, and never will be, “in the past.” We learn from Esther’s writing the responsibility she feels to continue to learn and share her family history, an obligation handed down to her from her parents and older sisters to help shape those who will come after.

Alfred Traum adds his voice to this volume by writing about experiences that might go unheard without their publication here. He has provided us with a story titled “Britain’s Response,” in which he describes his experience of traveling to volunteer to fight for the new country of Israel, as well as his eventual return to his required service in the British Army. His commitment to continuing to chronicle and publish his writing makes clear these writers’ grasp of the power of individual stories to shape a greater understanding of the issues we face today, through the lens of personal narrative that recounts a powerful history.

Now nearly 20 years since the first meeting at the Museum of The Memory Project, these writers represent the urgent voices of survivors who have made it their mission to remind us, through their speeches, interviews, and personal writing, what their experience means to the world we find ourselves in today, what their past continues to mean for our present and future. While memory is at the heart of the work in which these writers are engaged, their work is not pointed toward the past, or rather it comes from a past they hope to translate for us, to help to convey the urgency of their message for the future. They see their work, for some it has been almost a second career spanning nearly 20 years, as a responsibility to speak out against hatred. Maybe more than ever before, these writers see this expression—told through individual stories of lives lived through and after the Holocaust—as both a call to act and as guidance for how to do so.

Maggie Peterson, PhD, Writing Instructor, The Memory Project



My Friends Sidi and Milek Natansohn

Ruth Cohen

Ruth Cohen, from Mukachevo, Czechoslovakia, who, along with her sister, was first imprisoned in Auschwitz in April 1944, then in several other concentration and forced labor camps beginning in October of the same year.

I MET SIDI (SIDONIA) in July 1948 at my first job in this country. I arrived in the United States in April 1948. We worked side by side as floor girls in a clothing factory and quickly became good friends. We talked a lot as we were working, but I got caught talking and was fired as a result.

I was her maid of honor. We celebrated each other's birthdays, wedding anniversaries, and many holidays. We rejoiced in our children's birthdays, b'nai mitzvah, weddings, and then in the births of grandchildren. We traveled the world together, had a great time doing all sorts of exciting things, and we played bridge often. Sometimes when playing bridge, Milek, her husband, would get very annoyed with Sidi if she made a mistake, but it was all minor.

We were good and close friends until about five years ago; then I stopped hearing from Sidi. I would call her and she would say, "I will definitely call you soon," but she didn't. After a while, I stopped calling. When I finally called again, I found that their phone number had been disconnected. Of course I was worried but did not want to call their children. I guess I was afraid to hear bad news.

Finally, I called the synagogue that they belonged to in Sharon, Massachusetts, and the staff very kindly gave me her new phone number. When I finally got enough courage to dial that number, I found out that I was calling a nursing home in Bethesda, Maryland, about four miles from our house. Then I called their daughter only to find out that Sidi has Alzheimer's and Milek has dementia.

We visited them once. Both my husband and I were devastated. We promised to visit them frequently, but so far we haven't been able to get ourselves to go back. I am very upset that they are so unwell and also about the fact that it hurts so much that I cannot make myself go visit them.

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My “Career” in the Polish Army

Marcel Drimer

Born in Drohobycz, Poland, in 1934, Marcel Drimer survived the war first by hiding in secret bunkers in the town’s ghetto, then in the home of a Ukrainian family.

IN THE 1950s IN COMMUNIST POLAND, military service was mandatory for all men starting at age 18. Physically fit university students had to attend officer training courses. Most high-ranking officers of the Polish Armed Forces were Poles born and educated in Russia. Each university trained officers in a different specialty; ours was military engineers, sometimes called Sappers. One day each week, in my case on Tuesday, we would put on our uniforms and attend classes and practice at the shooting range. We studied the structure and strategy of the US Armed Forces as the enemy that we eventually might face in the next war.

Henryk Szwarc, one of the three or four other Jewish men in my company, was my sergeant. He was four years older than me and fulfilled his two-year military service, finishing as a sergeant. He lived with his family in Wrocław and they often invited me for Shabbat dinner. We became friends and still are.

During the summer breaks after freshman and junior years, we attended six weeks of active-duty camps. The first day we were issued uniforms, boots, cigarettes, and other necessities. When asked if I smoked, I replied, “I don’t.” Henryk said, “Of course you do, you idiot.” “If the sergeant says that I do, then I do,” I replied. The cigarette ration was ten per day, and he smoked 20.

Another time he assigned me to a 24-hour guard duty. I was furious, but he told me to shut up. The reveille sounded at 2 a.m. and everyone, except the guard unit, got 15 minutes to gather their belongings and guns. They were each issued two 20-pound anti-tank mines to carry with them on a 30-kilometer march. After that, I never questioned Henryk’s orders.

A noncommissioned officer (NCO) asked for volunteers to play chess. I thought, “What could be wrong with playing chess?” When he got “a team” of six players, he handed each of us a bucket with sawdust and ordered us to clean the floor tiles with it. We were housed in old German Army



Marcel Drimer, second row, second from the left, in the Polish Army, 1954. *Courtesy of Marcel Drimer*

barracks where the tiles, looking like a chess board, were grooved so that nail studded boots of German infantry would not slide on the floor. The only way to clean them was to press sawdust into the grooves with bare knuckles.

Later, when asked to volunteer again we would reply in unison, “All volunteers went to Korea.” It was a reference to Chinese “volunteers” fighting in Korea.

The Hungarian Uprising of 1956 was started by students, and most of the student soldiers in my unit decided

to demonstrate in solidarity with the Hungarians. We were planning to wear our uniforms and march through town in formation with pro-Hungarian placards. Our commander, Col. Maculewicz, pleaded with us in his Russian-accented Polish for restraint, addressing us for the first time as “Panowie” (gentlemen). He explained that Russian forces were standing on the borders of Czechoslovakia and East Germany, waiting for a provocation to attack Poland. We listened to him, had a few beers, shouted some slogans, and went home.

Before the end of the camp after junior year, we were supposed to take final exams and receive an NCO rank. At the same time, some of my family got permission to immigrate to Israel. I asked for a Sunday pass to say goodbye to them, but was refused by the commandant. Here is the conversation that took place. The commandant: “I can’t give you a pass, because you would use the military discount for the train tickets.” Me: “Give me back my civilian clothing and I will pay full price.” Him: “If you leave the camp in your civilian clothing, you will be arrested as a deserter.” Me: “If you don’t give me the pass, I will refuse to answer any questions on the final exam.” Him: “We will see about that. Furthermore, I am not going to give you the pass because your family is going to Israel, an enemy of Poland.”

When I sat for the exam, I saluted, gave my name and rank (private) and stated, “That’s all I will say.” When the diplomas were handed out to the cadets, I received mine as well. The officer in charge said: “We have invested in you through four years of training, you did okay, so you have passed.” However, I had barely passed and received a rank of “corporal aspirant.” In 1960, while I was preparing to immigrate to America, I was summoned to report for three months of active military duty after which I would be promoted to the rank of second lieutenant. The problem

was that after any term of active duty, one would not be allowed to leave the country for three years. I requested a private meeting with the recruiting officer. I gave him some made-up excuses and bribed him with vodka and money and promised to serve the following year. It was risky, but it worked. The next year, I was already in America. Father wrote to me that military police came looking for me. It seems that I will never rank higher than a corporal.

My consolation was that after working for the US Army, which I did for 20 years, my civil rating of GS-15 was considered to be equal to a colonel.

My friend Henryk stayed a year longer at the university, earned a master's degree in engineering, and moved to Israel. He worked for the ZIM-International Shipping Company as chief engineer.

He quit smoking a long time ago.



Marcel Drimer, second row, far right, in the Polish Army, 1954. *Courtesy of Marcel Drimer*

Small World

MY 13th BIRTHDAY ON MAY 1, 1947, WAS APPROACHING, and my parents decided that I should have a bar mitzvah. At that time my family lived in Wałbrzych, a formerly German town where many of the refugees from the Polish territories taken over by the Soviet Union had settled. Wałbrzych was a “Wild West” town, full of people from all over Poland—Germans waiting deportation to Germany, criminals, looters, fortune seekers, and about 4,000 Jews. We left Drohobycz, where I was born, because it became a part of the Ukrainian Republic of the Soviet Union.

During the high holidays of 1941, the first year of German occupation of Drohobycz, my father went to the Great Synagogue where the Chief Rabbi, Dr. Jacob Avigdor, was leading services. During his sermon he said: “God, if you are, have mercy on us, don’t let us all perish.” From that moment, Father decided that God did not exist for him. Father also often said that if we survive, we will go to the first church and ask the priest to convert us to Catholicism.

But after surviving, we had more important things to do than to convert. We had to resume normal life, find a place to live, catch up on my and my sister’s education, etc. Furthermore, it would be hypocritical to convert from a non-believing Jew to a non-believing Catholic. So, with this in mind, I was surprised that Father wanted me to have a bar mitzvah. Perhaps it was because of his own religious upbringing or because our relatives in America were religious and I might try to go to America someday.

Father had a friend, Mr. Bodner, who had been a student in a rabbinical yeshiva before the war. In Wałbrzych, he worked as an accountant and he offered to prepare me for my bar mitzvah. It took him about four weeks to do the job. It was very basic. Since I did not read or write Hebrew, I memorized the whole ceremony. On the day of bar mitzvah (May 1, an official holiday, International Labor Day), father took a bottle of vodka and a honey cake to Mr. Bodner’s apartment. We had with us five or six men, not enough for a *minyan*, the number of men required to be present to conduct religious services, which is a minimum of ten males over 13 years of age. Father walked over to the Jewish Social and Cultural Society Center and invited a few men so we would have a minyan. None of my friends came; there was no hora dancing or celebratory speeches, none of the jubilation that usually accompanies a bar mitzvah in America.

I received a package with a *tallit* (prayer shawl), *tefillin* (phylacteries), a few chocolate bars, and some canned kosher food from an American Jewish charitable organization. One day after coming home from school, I started putting on the tefillin, but mother told me that I had to do it first thing in the morning. This was the end of my efforts to pray.

Sixteen years later, I had been living in Washington for two years when Ania arrived on December 6, 1963, and we got married on December 29. At that time, I worked as a designer for the US Post Office and was sent to New York City to modernize mail handling equipment. We rented a small apartment on 34th Street, within walking distance of the main office. We had a great time. I was receiving overtime pay and per diem pay, and we often met for lunch in a restaurant and went to Broadway shows with Polish friends.

One sunny Sunday in the spring, we went to a festival in Central Park. Central Park was our favorite place to walk, watch people, see magicians and clowns, and to relax. We bought lunch from a food cart. After a few minutes I felt terrible stomach pains. I hailed a taxi to take us to our apartment. My pain was getting worse, and speaking in Polish, I told Ania that I didn't think I could make it to the apartment. The driver turned to me and in perfect Polish said, "You must stop thinking about it and it will go away; let's change the subject. Where in Poland did you live?" "I lived in Wałbrzych before coming to the States," I answered. He replied, "I have a brother in Israel who lived there right after the war." It turned out that his brother was the Mr. Bodner who had prepared me for my bar mitzvah. The stomachache temporarily disappeared, and we made it safely to the apartment. At that time in New York there were about eight million people.

"Volunteering" for Service in Poland

GOVERNMENT AGRICULTURAL FARMS known as *Panstwowe Gospodarstwa Rolnicze* (PGRs) were established in the late 1940s on large farms confiscated from rich farmers. These farms were now owned by the government, as well as the large farms in the Regained Territories incorporated into Poland from Germany after World War II. They were fashioned on the Soviet *Kolkhozes* (collective farms), and were equally unproductive. Many farmers left the PGRs for a somewhat better life in towns and, as a result, there was a shortage of farm workers.

At the same time, the government established a paramilitary youth organization, *Sluzba Polsce* (Service for Poland). It was an arm of the ruling Communist Workers Party whose purpose was political and ideological indoctrination, with some military training. Membership in *Sluzba Polsce* was mandatory. It also used free "volunteer" labor to work on the PGRs. During the harvest time, we spent many Sundays working there.

One summer, just before the end of the school year, a delegate from PGR came to our school with a party representative to recruit boys 16 years and older to "volunteer" for two weeks during summer vacation to work on a PGR.

We were to work in the fields and orchards six days a week, 11 hours a day. Sunday mornings were for military training. The rest of the time was for rest and recreation. We did not get paid. This schedule did not allow for time to go to church. Except for a few Jewish boys, all prospective “volunteers” were practicing Catholics. What would happen if one did not volunteer, somebody asked the party representative? “If you want to graduate, you better volunteer,” came the terse response. And so I signed up, giving up time that I could have spent lazily: reading, meeting with friends, or just doing nothing.

The two weeks on the farm were hard work. Once I was asked to retrieve a horse from a nearby village where it had been fitted with new horseshoes. Imagine a city boy trying to ride a horse bareback for the first time in his life. To add insult to injury, the horse’s shoes were improperly fitted, causing the horse to stumble repeatedly and the rider (me) ending up on the horse’s neck. It must have looked ridiculous, entertaining people from a passing train. I, however, was not amused, and suffered from a sore backside for many days. This experience may be one of the reasons that I became an engineer and not a jockey.

After graduating high school in 1953, I considered studying combustion engines. This specialty was no longer available at the Polytechnic Institute of Wrocław. Instead, an Agricultural Machinery Department was established to support mechanization of the PGRs. I was encouraged to enroll. After graduating in 1957 with a bachelor of science in mechanical engineering specializing in agricultural machinery, I worked for about six months in an agricultural machine repair shop.

Wałbrzych was a coal mining town, and I got a job in a coal mine machinery design office, which was more interesting and better paying.

The PGRs, as with many other government enterprises, were subsidized by the government, and despite that, were still a failure. Before World War II, Poland was an exporter of food, but during the Communist era, the country had to import food.

All this “volunteering” did not make me averse to volunteering in general. There is “volunteering” Communist style, and volunteering from the heart.

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America

Albert Garih

Albert Garih was born in Paris, France. He survived the war in hiding with neighbors and in a Catholic boarding school for boys in the northeastern suburb of Montfermeil.

I WAS SIX YEARS OLD WHEN I FIRST HEARD OF AMERICANS. The first ones I saw were our liberators. It was in the summer of 1944, and I was hiding in a Catholic boarding school in Montfermeil, a suburb northeast of Paris. Paris was liberated on August 25, 1944, and we were liberated two days later. A student who had left the school came back shouting, “The Allies are coming! The Allies are coming!” So, we all went to the main street to welcome them: tanks, trucks, and jeeps with soldiers with different kinds of helmets and smiles on their faces, giving away chocolate, chewing gum, and even cigarettes. They were our liberators. The headmistress of my school, who was probably the one who knew about my situation as a hidden Jewish child, was holding my hand. (I was the youngest student in that school, and she wanted to make sure I was safe.) I was told they were Americans, and it was the first time I heard of Americans and America. I had heard of the Germans, of course, of the English, of the Italians, but who were these boys? Where did they come from? I was just six, after all.

But I really began to dream of America a little later, watching Hollywood movies at the matinees, where we would go with the whole family every Sunday afternoon. Whether it was *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, starring Errol Flynn, war movies, or westerns, Laurel and Hardy, and most of all, Charlie Chaplin, I was always under the spell. In westerns and war movies, it was always good guys fighting bad guys, and that did sharpen my sense of justice, even if in some westerns, the American Indians were always pictured as villains. It was through movies that I began to dream of America.

A few years later, in 1953, my elder sister, Jacqueline, was hired by the United Nations and went to work in New York. I still remember how the whole family escorted her to Orly Airport. She was the first child to fly away, and we didn’t know when we would see her again. So, that was a big separation for us, and I remember even my father shedding a few tears.

In those days, people traveled in style. She flew a Pan American Clipper from Paris to New York. That is when I began to dream of America with growing intensity. Back then, of course, it was

only a dream for a teenager growing up in postwar France. In those days, America was rich, and we were poor. I remember the first CinemaScope movies like *How to Marry a Millionaire* with Lauren Bacall and Marilyn Monroe, and the beautiful New York City skyline. At that time, I was already dreaming of traveling the world, and of the United States as one of the destinations. But it would take me a quarter century to come and settle in the United States. And even then, it happened by chance. When I started my career as a translator, which I had chosen precisely in order to travel and discover the world, my first job was less than a mile away from where I had grown up. My first job outside of France took me to Cameroon in Africa, where my wife and I moved as a young married couple with our first daughter, Judith, who was three months old. We spent four years there, after which we moved to Canada, where we stayed for three years. When I was finally offered a job at the World Bank in Washington, I thought we would probably stay there no more than two or three years, yet here we are, 40-plus years later, with American passports and American children and grandchildren.

When I first came to America, I was not unconditionally seduced. I remember, for instance, how shocked I was to learn that not all working people had health insurance. Coming from France where health insurance was a given for everyone, that was shocking to me. And I remember having a candid conversation about that with some American friends who were politically liberal. However, I quickly realized that they were offended that someone welcomed into their country would start to criticize it. Today, I know better how to handle such discussions, and besides, my US passport emboldened me to speak openly about subjects that still shock me in this country, like racism and guns. Anyhow, today, I am a proud US citizen, despite the imperfections that still bother me about America. After all, is there a perfect place on earth? If there is, I still haven't found it.

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Despair and Happiness

Agi Geva

Agi Geva was born in Budapest, Hungary. She and her mother and sister together survived Auschwitz, Plaszow, forced labor, and a death march before being liberated by US troops in 1945.

HOW CAN THE SAME DAY BE THE WORST AND THE BEST?

A gloomy day that could not have been worse, more hopeless, turned into a day of happiness that cannot be measured.

The morning was as usual as any had been the prior few months: the opposite of a morning of any normal human being when a day starts fresh after a night's sleep.

My day was different. I just ended a whole night's march and started the day by entering a barn with the intention of getting some rest and possibly sleep. We were not supposed to be seen by the villagers during the day.

I was so tired and exhausted that thirst and hunger became secondary considerations. I fell on the straw, but the hunger pangs woke me soon. My fellow prisoners found some raw potatoes and cabbage in the back of the barn. The guards brought in some milk and bread that they distributed among us.

I was scared at the thought of walking again when night came, in the cold, being so thirsty and hungry.

It was the worst night of my whole imprisonment.

It was very cold and very windy. We walked through stony terrain, crossed shallow rivers paved with sharp pebbles and rocks. My feet were bleeding. The rags bound around them started to come apart. I was frozen and my motions became automatic. I started to cry for the first time since the death march started.

Out of consideration for Mother and Shosha, I had tried not to show any negative feelings or emotions until then.

The guards kept yelling, “*los, los*” (quicker). “We have to get to the station to catch the train and then you can all sit down.”

We were guarded by a female officer, a male officer, and six soldiers.

I did not care anymore. I just sat down and announced that I was going to stay right where I was. I could not get up, I could not walk anymore. I could not stop crying.

I felt someone lifting me, half carrying me. It was the German female officer. “The station is not so far away; you have to keep on going,” she kept saying.

There was a rumor that the Germans wanted us to get to the station quickly as the train was thought to have guns and a written order to execute us.

I really didn’t care anymore and kept on sitting down, desperately repeating that I couldn’t walk.

Eventually we got to the station.

The train was gone. We saw that the two German officers were given some white envelopes.

Later we found out that the envelopes contained false documents, passes, to cross the border into Switzerland.

We were sent back to the forest.

Everyone was desperate, exhausted, and disappointed that we would not continue by train.

Then someone called out, “Look, there are no guards around.”

It was dark, but the guards had always been visible and were heard even in the dark. It was true though—they were no longer around us.

Then the Polish *Lagerälteste* (a camp inmate put in charge of other inmates) gathered us around her and said, “You should know this, that from this day, April 28, 1945, you are free.”

Mother looked for us, found us, hugged us, and kept us close to her. I cannot remember whether she said anything at that moment.

I stopped crying.

It started to make sense.

I was free. But was I really?

It seemed like a miracle, magic.

I felt an indescribable relief, a cocktail of happiness.

I felt such gratitude.

There was hope and joy again.

Ever since then I never missed a day appreciating my freedom and saying a silent prayer for it.

Dreams

JUNE, 1944. MY FAMILY WAS IN A CONCENTRATION CAMP; my mother, Rosalia, my sister Shosha, 13 years old, and me, Agi, 14 years old. My father, Zoltan, had died a few months earlier, on the same day that the Germans occupied Hungary.

I was dreaming. I was at home, getting ready for school. I even heard the voice of Shosha, telling me to hurry up. Then I woke up to the touch of a rough grey blanket on my skin and I knew that I should not open my eyes. I should linger a little longer in the dream. I should even daydream and concentrate on those pleasant memories. But the loud wake-up call put an end to all that. Reality became the present—the unbelievable prisoner situation that I still wasn't able to understand or get used to. The dream followed me during the whole day, pulling me back into the past of not that long ago.

We were allowed only a couple of hours of sleep, but I could not wait for the night, when I might dream again of the same or some similar pleasantness, that used to be mine, my life, my reality.

It made the hunger more bearable, the thirst easier, the extremes of heat or cold and the harsh inhumane treatment by the guards less horrific. When the real dream did not come to me, I daydreamed, imagined, and relived my childhood. Sometimes the dream was a nightmare of the awful reality of being a prisoner, kept behind fences, limited in movements, kept from having showers, using the bathroom, changing clothes, having freedom of speech. In reality, someone decided the meager amount of food and water I was to have. I also heard that there was a possibility of not surviving on so little food if the situation lasted much longer. That was scary.

Then one day, almost a year later, I dreamed that I was sleeping on a bunk with some strange girls and women, being a prisoner. I gradually began to feel some sensations, but somehow, they did not make sense to me. That acute pain of hunger in my stomach, which I had grown accustomed to, was not there and my mouth was not dry.

When I touched my head, it was not the baldness but soft hair that I felt under my fingers. But I was still reluctant to open my eyes. I touched soft fabric, my head was on a pillow, there was music coming from somewhere, mixed with the chirping of birds. When I stretched my arms, my hands did not touch a stranger.

When at last I woke up, completely, and opened my eyes, I realized that I was not in the concentration camp, in a barrack, that I was home, free and all that suffering was really, really behind me, in the past.

I was deliriously happy!

Never since then have I taken my FREEDOM for granted.

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History Repeating Itself

Peter Gorog

Peter Gorog was born in Hungary in March 1941. After his father died in a forced labor battalion, Peter and his mother survived the Holocaust living in multiple apartments and in the ghetto in Budapest.

ON MAY 5, 2019, I WAS ONE OF TWO SPEAKERS at a Yom Hashoah commemoration in Denver, Colorado. The gathering could not have been more timely. When I saw the printed program for the first time the day before, I was glad to see that someone had titled my presentation, “Surviving Mass Genocide. Anti-Semitism; History Repeating Itself.” Great title, although I thought I might have put a question mark at the end, as I was not ready to make such an affirmative statement. I would have raised it as a question: “Is History Repeating Itself?”

On the morning of the commemoration I changed my mind entirely. The original title was the right one. No question mark was needed anymore. From that day on, I would have no doubt that the correct title is “History Is Repeating Itself!” The exclamation point is the right punctuation mark indicating how strongly I feel about the hatred against the Jewish people in 2019, here in the United States, in Israel, and all over the world.

On May 5, 2019, the rising antisemitism and the unrelenting terrorist attacks against Israel, became very personal. What changed my mind about the title of my presentation is a text message I received the day before and a frantic phone call at 4 o'clock the next morning from my daughter Ilana, who was volunteering for a year in Rehovot, Israel. Here is the verbatim transcript:

[5/4, 15:45] Ilana: Please don't tell mommy cause I don't want to worry her but I can hear rockets and sirens in the far distance

[5/4, 15:50] Ilana: They're getting louder :(

[5/4, 15:58] Peter: I read what you sent to mom. We are with David, we will pray.

[5/4, 17:29] Peter: Anything new?

[5/4, 17:34] Ilana: Heard the last loud boom 30ish minutes ago

[5/4, 17:34] Ilana: I don't know if it's a rocket or iron dome intercepting it

[5/4, 17:34] Ilana: About 10 minutes ago I saw some fighter jets going towards the Gaza area

[5/4, 17:34] Peter: Are you still at the shelter?

The phone call early the next morning came from a bomb shelter where Ilana had to move because—for the first time since she arrived in Israel last August—the air-raid sirens went off in Rehovot.

According to the final count, in the course of two days, Hamas launched from Gaza almost 700 rockets to kill Israeli citizens indiscriminately. They killed four Israelis, dozens were injured, and some of them are still in critical condition. We, the Jews, are not safe anymore in our homeland, Paris, Brussels, Pittsburgh, or California. The Yom Hashoah ceremony in Colorado was held at the local Babi Yar memorial, and I was reminded that we are targeted again just like the more than 30,000 Jews 78 years ago on the outskirts of Kiev, Ukraine. They were massacred for one reason only, because they were Jewish.

I am a child survivor of the Holocaust, all too familiar with the sounds of air-raid sirens. I spent the last three months of World War II mostly in the basement of a house in the Budapest ghetto. Three months on a blanket, on a dirt floor, where wood and coal were stored for heating the apartments. Three months with hardly any food, water, or electricity. Three months in a basement where the chances of surviving a bombing was only five percent better than standing on the street. Thirty-nine years ago, when I escaped the miseries of the communist system, I never thought that one day one of my daughters would be forced to take refuge in a bomb shelter in Israel.

After surviving the Holocaust, I also survived 30 years of Communism in Hungary. When the oppression became intolerable I defected to the United States in 1980. I came here to find freedom and yes, I did find it. I was free to reclaim my Jewish identity. I was free to practice the Jewish religion. I was also free to find out what the Holocaust was, because the Holocaust was taboo in Hungary while I was growing up there. For a long time it was not taught in schools, nor was it mentioned in the government-controlled newspapers, radio, and television. No books were published and no films were shown about the Holocaust. The silence was maddening to me. I did not realize until after arriving in the United States the complicity of the pre-war Hungarian government in the deportation of the Jews to the Nazi killing camps. The annihilation of almost 600,000 Hungarian Jews, three out of four, was never mentioned while I still lived in Hungary!

I did find freedom and safety 39 years ago here in the United States, but our country in 2019 is different and not all the changes are for the better. The long-sought freedom and safety was taken on October 27, 2018. That is the date of the Pittsburgh shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue where 11 people died and six were injured. They died and suffered injuries for one reason only, they were Jews who wanted to practice their religion on a Sabbath morning. Since last October, a police officer greets me every Saturday at the door of my synagogue in the suburb of “The Capital of the Free World.” This uniformed police officer symbolizes the changes I, as a recently reconnected Jew, have experienced in the last 39 years. I, as a Jew, no longer feel safe here in the United States. The long-sought freedom I found here is gone.

On Saturday April 27, 2019, just one week before the Yom Hashoah commemoration in Denver, a gunman opened fire at a synagogue in Poway, California, killing one woman and wounding three other people. Another Jewish religious service where people died and were wounded for one reason only, they were Jewish.

A little while ago those of us who celebrated Passover, the Jewish holiday dedicated to the idea of being liberated, being free in our own land, we read from the Haggadah:

“In every generation they rise against us to destroy us; and the Holy One, blessed be He, saves us from their hand!”

This is a yearly reminder that history repeats itself. Although there is rising antisemitism and anti-Israel sentiment, we can also find consolation that exactly 71 years ago today, on May 14, 1948, the Jewish state was reestablished. We might not be safe individually anywhere on this planet, but, “Am Yisrael chai!” The Jewish people live!

Millennials and the Holocaust

HEADLINES FROM THE AMERICAN MEDIA in April 2018 after a Holocaust-related survey was published:

“Holocaust study: Two-thirds of millennials don’t know what Auschwitz is”
(Washington Post, April 12, 2018)

“4 in 10 millennials don’t know 6 million Jews were killed in Holocaust, study shows”
(CBS News, April 12, 2018)

“Holocaust Is Fading From Memory, Survey Finds” (New York Times, April 12, 2018)

“The Startling Statistics About People’s Holocaust Knowledge” (NPR, April 14, 2018)

“Why We’re Forgetting the Holocaust” (New York Post, April 15, 2018)

“Study Shows Americans are Forgetting about the Holocaust” (NBC News, April 12, 2018)

How is this possible in 2018 in the United States?

Being the father of six children, four of them millennials, it is inconceivable for me that this could be true only two generations after the Holocaust. Being a Holocaust survivor makes these headlines even more disheartening.

I grew up in Communist Hungary, and I was in the millennials’ age group in the ’60s and ’70s. Had they conducted such a survey then, I would have been part of this sad statistic. There were plenty of reasons for this ignorance, among them were the survivors’ reluctance to share their stories, and the Communist system’s unwillingness to face the responsibilities of the government’s complicity in the demise of approximately 600,000 Hungarian Jews. We were not taught in schools about this genocide, there were no books published, there were no memorials for the victims, no plays or movies that would have made us aware of what happened to six million Jews between 1933 and 1945 in Europe.

But this is 2018 and the country is the United States! We have the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, with over 45 million visitors (24 percent of them school children) since its opening in 1993. In 2018, 19.5 million visitors representing 238 countries and territories saw the Museum’s website, and as of 2017, the Museum’s YouTube channel has 6.5 million lifetime views. There are museums and memorials dedicated to the memory of the victims in nearly every major American city. There are yearly commemorations of International Holocaust Remembrance Day in January and Yom Hashoah in the spring. As of 2017, there were eight states in the United States where the Holocaust is part of the mandatory school curriculum. Forty-eight states and the District of Columbia have social-studies standards that include the study of the Holocaust. There are hundreds of Holocaust memoirs and fictional stories, movies, and plays galore. And still two-thirds of millennials don’t know what Auschwitz is and four in ten millennials don’t know that six million Jews were killed in the Holocaust.

In spite of all of these efforts, here are just a few signs of how the ignorance revealed by the survey affects our country in general, and American Jews in particular. Sometimes, Jews are still killed for one—and only one—reason, because they are Jewish, such as in the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting on October 27, 2018. Antisemitism is on the rise. Israel is still threatened with

annihilation by Iran and countless terrorist groups. Anti-Israel sentiment is fashionable at university campuses, among the political left, and on the far right. With the help of the internet, the voice of Holocaust denial is amplified many times over. Jewish stereotypes (money grabbing, world domination conspiracy theory, globalism, even controlling the weather) are alive and well. Those who studied history know well that similar events, beliefs, and opinions were among the precursors to the rise of the Nazis in Germany.

So why are these statistics concerning the Holocaust and the millennials particularly troubling? We have to remember that the Holocaust happened not only because of the Nazi government and their collaborators in Europe, but also because of the countless bystanders who did nothing when they saw discrimination, segregation, and finally the killing of their fellow citizens. Keep in mind these bystanders came from one of the best-educated populations in Europe. My worry for the millennials, and the generations that follow them, is that their ignorance and/or indifference could result in history repeating itself.

Working as a volunteer at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum also gives me opportunities to see a silver lining in spite of the stark survey numbers. On behalf of the Museum, I travel around the country telling my family's experience during the Holocaust. I also have opportunities to talk to high school and college students who visit Washington, and the Museum is often the highlight of their trip. They listen intently and their questions show that they understand what happened during the Holocaust, and they are ready to stand up against discrimination. They are not going to be bystanders. After my presentations, I get many thank-you notes from students and teachers and the recurring motif is that they will remember forever (their word!) what happened to the six million Jews during the Holocaust and among them my family. I am always encouraged when I hear that these young people were inspired by what they heard and they would do their best to see that genocide will not happen again.

One of the greatest rewards for my volunteering for the Museum was when I received a note from a young girl who was inspired by the excerpts from my mother's diary that I usually read during my presentations. She promised that she would start a diary right away, writing down what she had heard and how she felt after visiting the Museum. This eighth grader wanted her future grandchildren to know what the Holocaust was and how hard she plans to study and work to make sure that it will never happen again.

To Be a Free People in Our Land

As long as the Jewish spirit is yearning deep in the heart,
With eyes turned toward the East, looking toward Zion,
Then our hope—the two-thousand-year-old hope—will not be lost:
To be a free people in our land,
The land of Zion and Jerusalem.
“Hatikvah” (National Anthem of Israel)

As a survivor who volunteers at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, I frequently speak to students about my family’s ordeal during the Holocaust. During the question and answer part of my presentation, I have gotten this question more than once, “Why didn’t your parents immigrate to Israel to avoid the Holocaust?” Unfortunately, this question shows that our contemporary history education needs some fine-tuning, so students can learn that the state of Israel did not exist until three years after the Holocaust was over.

Prior to the Holocaust, many fervent Zionist Jews, mostly young and unmarried, immigrated to the territory that was known as Mandatory Palestine after World War I. Unfortunately, my parents were not among them. I lost my father in the Holocaust, and when my mom and I were liberated from the Budapest ghetto in 1945, we did not use the opportunity to leave the country where three out of every four Jews perished at the hands of Nazis and their collaborators. When the Communist Party took over the government in 1949, the borders were closed. In 1956, after the unsuccessful Hungarian uprising, the borders opened again for a few short weeks but my aging parents did not want to start a new life in an unknown land (my mom had remarried in 1953).

My longing for Israel was not awakened until late in my life when I defected to the United States and I became conscious of my Jewish identity. It was even later that I learned the Israeli national anthem, “Hatikvah.” *Hatikvah* means “the hope” in Hebrew and it is about the eternal hope of the Jews to live as a free people in our land. After surviving the Holocaust and living under the oppressive Communist system in Hungary for 35 years, freedom has always had a special meaning for me. The words of “Hatikvah” tied together my identity, the concept of freedom, and the significance of the land.

My first opportunity to immigrate to Israel came in 1981. I was waiting for more than a year to have a favorable decision for my political asylum request in the United States. It just was not meant to be; my asylum request was turned down. I was told to leave the country in 30 days. I panicked, where would I go? My lawyer advised me that I was eligible to go to Israel under

the Law of Return and obtain citizenship immediately, or we could appeal the decision and try to get a visa based on my unique professional qualifications. At that time, I had not fully embraced my Jewish identity and, being practical, I chose the latter option. By that time, my English was good enough and I dreaded learning a new language again. It was also an important factor in my decision to stay in the United States that I had an uncle, aunt, and a few cousins in Baltimore who are a surrogate family; while in Israel, I only had a few second and third cousins I had never met before.

It was after my first visit to Israel in 2006 that I fell in love with the Land and her people. That was the time when my Jewish spirit started yearning deep in my heart. I volunteered for three weeks with the Israel Defense Forces and it was a life-changing experience. By that time, I was already 55, father of six girls, the husband of an American wife, a homeowner with a mortgage almost paid off, and a successful career in the high-tech industry. *Aliyah* (immigration to Israel) was not an option for me anymore. In the subsequent years, all of my daughters, except the youngest one, volunteered for one or two summers in Israel. Without exception, my daughters came back determined that they would ultimately settle down in Israel. My heart was bursting with pride for a few months, until they settled back into their comfortable American lives.

In spite of my disappointment, I never gave up on my dream that someone from our family would settle in the Promised Land. My last hope was and still is my youngest daughter Ilana, who is currently volunteering as an English teacher in Israel for a year. After graduating from University of Maryland, Baltimore County, she is teaching English to economically disadvantaged children. We communicate almost daily using the WhatsApp smartphone application. My heart is bursting with pride again, although more cautiously, as I sense her growing love for Israel. As she makes connections with Sabras (native-born Israelis) and with the children of my friends who immigrated to Israel years ago, she is more and more aware of her identity and I sense that she just might be the one who fulfills my dream.

It is part of our Passover celebration every year that we conclude the reading of the Haggadah with a declaration, “Next year in Jerusalem.” For me, half of the hope expressed in the “Hatikvah” came true as I am now part of a “*free people*.” I plan to celebrate Passover with my daughter next year “*in our land, the land of Zion and Jerusalem*.”

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My Journey to America

Julie Keefer

During the Holocaust, Julie Keefer and her family hid in a bunker in a forest, and later Julie posed as a family friend's niece at a home in Lwów, Poland, where she had been born.

ODORS OF SOOT AND SALT WATER FILL THE AIR. It is November 1948. I am seven years old. My *dziadzio* (grandfather, in Polish) has sent me to America for a “better life” than the one we had in the Robert Tyler Displaced Persons Camp in Linz, Austria, where he, my *babcia* (grandmother, in Polish), and I had been living in one room in an unheated, wooden barrack without indoor plumbing or running water. By “better life,” he meant a life of safety, shelter, and plentiful food for me.

I am standing on the grainy, gunmetal floor of the *General Omar Bundy*, an old US Naval vessel with two huge smokestacks. It has been converted so that it can be used to bring 780 European immigrants to Boston, Massachusetts, in America. I am standing hunched into myself, my new china doll clutched fiercely to my stomach. Tears stream down my face, and my stomach hurts from sobbing. The china doll is the first toy I’ve ever owned. Dziadzio had given her to me.

As I was getting on the ship, Dziadzio approached an older girl, about 13 or 14, whose name I do not remember. “Please watch out for my granddaughter. She is so little, and she is all I have left,” he told her. We orphans are accompanied by two silent, large birds—women in long black robes, hair hidden by black and white head covers.

I was uprooted from my happy, familiar world, where I laughed and scampered, leading a troop of girls, my faithful followers. We scaled fences and climbed forbidden cherry trees. We picked and gorged ourselves on the cherries while running to escape the owners who would try to catch us. I had been snatched from a world I knew, one in which I felt secure and loved, and was placed in a series of orphanages run by tall, silent women in black who spoke little and never hugged me. I was the youngest by at least five years in a group of orphan girls being sent to America.

I felt betrayed by my dziadzio. He sent me away. Before I left my last orphanage to come to America, my babcia hissed in my ear, “See how bad you are? Even your dziadzio doesn’t want you.” She had been tortured by the Gestapo. Dziadzio had not consulted her about sending me away. She was furious with him and could only cope by trying to punish me.

On the boat, we girls slept in hammocks, four deep, one on top of another. I don’t remember how the older girls got into their beds, but my hammock was on the bottom. The rocking of the ship, the swaying of the hammocks above me, as well as the motion of my own bed, made me dizzy. I felt nauseated. I needed to throw up. The nuns were too busy to care for one seasick lost sheep.

My teenage heroine had thick, dark, wavy hair and large, round, blue eyes. To me, she was gorgeous. She was kind to me. She walked me to the toilet, patted my back as I kept vomiting, and then washed my face and neck with cool water. She was warm and soft, and she hugged me often. I wish I could have thanked her, later in life, but we lost touch once we landed in America.

The entire trip took ten agonizing days. On about the eighth day, my face became swollen. I began to have a terrible toothache. My teeth hurt so badly that I cried. My teen angel told the nuns. One of the nuns put oil of cloves on my teeth and an ice pack on my mouth. That happened several times a day for the next two days or so. More than the pain, I remember the pungent, peppery, sweet smell of the oil of cloves. Today, whenever I smell cloves, I am transported back to that painful journey.

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Ghetto

Louise Lawrence-Israëls

Louise Lawrence-Israëls was born in Haarlem, Netherlands, and survived the war by hiding on the fourth floor of a row house in Amsterdam.

ONE OF MY FAVORITE PLACES TO VISIT IS VENICE, ITALY. Perhaps because I lived in Amsterdam for so many years, the water in and around Venice makes me feel connected to the city.

Many years ago, when my husband, Sidney, and I were visiting Venice, we walked for days, up and down bridges; every neighborhood was different. Of course, every street had cafes where you could sit down and drink a delicious cappuccino.

One day, we took a *vaporetto* (waterbus) to an area we hadn't explored and while walking around, we stumbled onto an unusual area: a square with trees and some benches, and we saw a lot of families. The men were all wearing *kippot*.

We were surprised. I approached a family and said “shalom” and tried to ask in Italian why they were there. They were very friendly and gave their answer in English. This was the first Jewish ghetto in the world, and they offered to give us a tour. We saw four synagogues and some of the housing. They showed us some of the entrances to the ghetto—some of the doors still had heavy locks. For several hundred years, Venetian Jews had to live in this ghetto and were locked in before nightfall. Since that first visit, we have returned to the ghetto many times; it is a good place for rest and reflection in a busy city.

In 2016, the ghetto celebrated its 500-year existence. For this occasion, a special exhibit was organized at the Palazzo Ducal in Venice. After checking the dates, I realized that we would be in Venice to see it.

Another event to mark this anniversary was the staging in the ghetto of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, performed in Italian. We were not going to be in Venice for the performance. We were sorry to have to miss it, but thought it was okay as it may have been too emotional for us.

Our visit was wonderful, even in the middle of a heat wave and with all the tourists walking in Saint Mark's Square with their selfie sticks. Sometimes it was hard to see buildings with all the cameras in front of you. How tourism has changed.

When we got home from our travels, we saw that *The Merchant of Venice* was going to be performed at the Kennedy Center. Sidney bought tickets for my birthday. I have always had mixed feelings about this play, but admired Shakespeare for writing about the plight of the Jews, so long ago.

The British actor Jonathan Pryce was playing Shylock. We like him very much.

The play was well done, but the audience was another story. Towards the end of the play—when Shylock cries in agony because he has to convert to Christianity—the audience started to laugh and applaud.

For me, this cry of agony brought back so much of what has happened in my life, the persecution of the Jewish people. I began to cry, with tears running down my cheeks.

How is it possible that people could see this tragedy as funny? This was only a play, seen by an emotional woman.

Today, *The Merchant of Venice* is actually very pertinent, only now people with another belief are singled out. We cannot let that happen again.

Hiding/Onderduiken

When I was little, I had no idea what hiding meant, not even the game of hide-and-seek, so loved by children. The terms going “into hiding,” being “in hiding,” or “hiding place” were not part of my vocabulary. Even going outside for the first time, when I was almost three years old, I did not associate it with having been in hiding.

My parents just never talked about our life during the war as being in hiding.

When we moved to a house on a street with lots of families with children, we always played outside on the street after school. It was very safe, as almost nobody had a car in those years after

the war. For the few families that did own a car, that car would not be home until after six o'clock, when the father returned home from work. We children played with hoops made from discarded bicycle wheels, we played marbles, and hide-and-seek, which was everybody's favorite game. We used all the backyards on our street to hide.

When I was about nine years old and in fourth grade, we talked about the war in school; we talked about how some people had to go "into hiding." When I came home, I asked my parents about that. They did confirm that it had happened, but still did not tell me anything about our own circumstances.

The next summer, I asked my friend Selma about our war years. At first she asked me if I had talked to my parents. I answered yes, but I wanted to know more. After Selma's explanation, I realized that we had been in hiding for almost three years.

Playing hide-and-seek took on a different meaning to me from then on. When my hiding place was found, and it always was, it started to make me afraid. I could not get the thought "what if we had been found" out of my head. It made me frightened, and I stopped liking the game.

The house we were living in then had two attics, with many nooks and crannies. I spent a lot of time looking for possible hiding places. I wanted to be prepared; you never knew, I reasoned, when the time would come that we would have to hide again.

Since then I have moved many times. The first thought is always, will there be a safe place to hide?

Only the times we lived on military bases gave me the feeling of being totally safe.

We moved to our current flat nine years ago. The world has changed so much. Now we all have computers and smartphones. But I realize now that in this changed world, there are no more hiding places. We could be found very fast with detectors and other smart devices.

Even all these years later, this is a very frightening thought for me.

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Post-Korea

Michel Margosis

Born in Brussels, Belgium, Michel Margosis spent the war in hiding on a farm in France, and in Marseille, and eventually escaped over the Pyrenees into Spain.

I WENT INTO THE ARMY SHORTLY AFTER WE MOVED IN BROOKLYN from a small apartment on the corner of Thirty-Sixth Street and Flatbush Avenue to a more spacious house on Fifty-Ninth Street off King's Highway and Remsen Avenue. This move accommodated my sister's family who had recently emigrated from Israel to live with us. When I left the United States Army and my military pay ceased, and with my mother now a widow, I needed to find employment. I took my time looking for a job after mustering out from active duty in the early days of summer 1954. I felt unsettled and took aptitude tests offered by B'nai B'rith to identify paths to my future. These tests showed a distinct and significant predilection to music, although I never studied or played any instruments. I knew absolutely nothing about music except that I loved listening to it, especially symphonies, chamber music, and operas.

With the summer of 1954 approaching, my mother had the idea to manage a small grocery concession in a bungalow colony in Ellenville, New York, in the heart of the Catskills. My sister Anna rented a bungalow nearby for several weeks with daughter Evelyn, and Ada, Anna's husband, would drive up from Brooklyn to visit on weekends. Thus, I became a grocer concessionaire by default and would go out to the local farmers' market to purchase crates of perishables, mainly fruits, that we would sell in the little shop. I became a small businessman! I gained certain insight in shopping for the home, sufficient to motivate me to shun that type of employment in the future. Despite my two years in the army, I felt no angst about my return to civilian life and felt fairly secure about wanting to go back to chemistry.

I had been totally remote from chemistry during my two years in the army, except for the Christmas drinks we formulated in the hospital pharmacy, but then I applied for a position as a chemist with the United States Atomic Energy Commission. Thus, late in 1954, I was interviewed for a position as analytical chemist in the hot labs of the Brookhaven National Laboratory. Congress established the US Atomic Energy Commission after World War II to foster and control the peacetime development of atomic science and technology. I was tested

on my knowledge of the chemistry of various elements in the periodic table and I did surprisingly well; I remembered enough radiochemistry that I studied in my senior year. I was hired and learned new wet chemical and instrumental techniques for performing the analysis of uranium, bismuth, and several other metals from the liquid sodium reactor.

Several weeks later, I faced my maker closer than I ever wished. I was returning from a drive into Patchogue, the nearest metropolis for shops and entertainment in the center of Long Island, and as I was getting closer to the barracks of the labs, I accelerated on a snow-wet straightaway I had presumed relatively safe. Suddenly, I found myself skidding off the road through a white log-fenced yard. A log crashed in through the windshield finding a spot in the passenger seat right next to me, with the car ending up yards past the entrance of a wooded area wedged between two big trees. My exit through either of the two front doors was blocked because of those trees, so I crawled onto the back seat, out the rear right door and stumbled out onto the road. Traffic was light, but after a long while, a car stopped to assist and gave me a lift to the Brookhaven health unit where the doctor gave me a double shot of whiskey to allay my anguish and regain my composure after swabbing the few superficial cuts and scratches I had suffered. He then sent me home, fortunately safe and sound. Home meant the old army wooden barracks that were the billets of Camp Upton during the war. These were converted into single rooms modestly furnished, surprisingly comfortable, with a cot, table, chairs, clothing closet, dresser, and an electric table-top hot plate cooker. A tow truck was called to retrieve my car. It was repaired only to the extent that it could legally move and was operable on the road.

After several months at Brookhaven, I felt a need to further pursue my education, but as there were no appropriate educational facilities nearby, I resigned my position, moved back to Brooklyn, and enrolled in a master's program at Brooklyn College.

The early 50s was also when my mother was advised by friends that like many other World War II refugees, she ought to sue the German government for miscellaneous damages. She filed a claim with a highly recommended attorney in Trier, a German Jew who survived the war and specialized in such cases. Actually, I completed the questionnaire on behalf of my mother and composed a brief history of about six pages of the family's plight. To our great surprise, she also had to show proof that she was Jewish. My mother spoke only Russian and Yiddish fluently but could read and write only in Russian, so a local rabbi provided her with a certificate *proving* that she was Jewish. All the documents were assembled, registered, and mailed to the attorney in Trier and then we waited. Several months later, we were advised that our attorney had died and we had to seek other representation. I phoned my Brooklyn College friend Nathan, another survivor from Belgium, who practiced real estate law but who had some experience with similar claims with his own family and was willing to take the case over. Unfortunately, he also died

relatively young, leaving the claim in limbo. Years after my mother passed, I filed a claim on behalf of my siblings and myself against Belgium, Germany, and Switzerland recalling that my father was covering the Zionist Convention and then became stranded in Geneva when the war began.

The claim filed by Nathan died with him. The claim that I filed was eventually resolved in our favor, after many years, through the German claim department.

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Leaving Nazi Germany

Harry Markowicz

Born in Berlin in 1937, Harry Markowicz survived the majority of the war in hiding with a Belgian family until the liberation of Brussels in September 1944.

IN 1938, MY FAMILY WAS LIVING IN BERLIN while the Nazis were intensifying the repression and violence against Jews. Late that summer, my father took my two siblings on a train to Aachen, a spa city near the borders of Belgium and the Netherlands. My sister, Rosi, was ten years old and my brother, Mani, was a year younger. I was just one year old, so my mother and I stayed home. During the train ride, Rosi shared with Mani what she had overheard at home: this was not a vacation as they had been told. As a matter of fact, they were going to Aachen to cross the border into Belgium.

They stayed in a hotel in Aachen several days while my father tried to locate a smuggler. Late one afternoon, he took Rosi and Manfred to the lobby of another hotel where 30 to 40 people of all ages were gathered, too many for one trip. However, everyone was eager to leave, so the smuggler—a German woman—agreed to take them all. Before setting out on their journey, they were given instructions: to avoid attracting attention, no one had luggage, at most a briefcase or a small backpack; if questioned by the police, they were to reply that they were going for a walk in the woods.

With the smuggler in the lead, the group started off by taking a streetcar to the edge of the city. From there, they walked on a road for a short while before entering the forest. They spread out and walked trying to make as little noise as possible to avoid alerting the border patrols. By this time, it had become dark, but it was a moonlit night so they could see enough not to stumble and to stay within sight of the other members of the group.

Every once in a while, they stopped to listen for the border patrol as they were getting closer to the roadway that was the German border. Upon a signal from the smuggler, they crossed the road and were then in no man's land, where they continued walking toward a second roadway which marked the Belgian border.

They got to the border road and the smuggler signaled that it was safe to cross. While they were crossing the road, two Dutch border guards came out of the forest and arrested them. Evidently, they had strayed from their course and ended up at the Dutch border, where guards escorted them to the nearest town in the Netherlands.

At the time, the Netherlands did not accept refugees. While the men were locked up in the local jail, the women and children were taken to a convent to spend the night. The next day, they were transferred to German authorities who took them back to Aachen where my father and the other adults were taken to jail.

The children in the group were separated from their parents but were not locked up or restrained in any way. Instead, the police turned them over to the Aachen Jewish community. Rosi and Mani spent the next couple of days in a Jewish family's home.

Meanwhile, the Aachen police telephoned my mother in Berlin and asked her whether she knew where her husband was. She replied that he was vacationing with their two older children in Aachen, the cover story my parents had agreed on before he left Berlin with Rosi and Manfred. The police then informed her that her husband was in the Aachen jail but that she could bring her children home.

Two days later, our mother's brother Abram came to bring Rosi and Manfred back to Berlin. My father was set free a week later, once the Nazi authorities had determined he had paid all his taxes, including the Reich Flight Tax, which as of June 1938 was set at 90 percent of assets.

Soon afterward, my father returned to the German-Belgian border and crossed into Belgium without getting caught. Then on September 26, 1938, my mother, siblings, and I rejoined my father in Antwerp, Belgium. My father had arranged for a German-speaking Belgian man who lived near the border to drive us into Belgium passing us off as his family. Until the end of World War I, that small region of Belgium adjoining the border had been part of Germany. Although we had entered the country illegally, the Belgian authorities allowed us to stay as stateless refugees.

Within a few weeks, the situation for Jews changed drastically during the night of November 9-10, 1938, in what became known as Kristallnacht. All over the German Reich, synagogues were burned and Jewish-owned businesses were vandalized by mobs of Nazis, members of the SA, and the Hitler Youth. Around 100 Jewish men were killed and 30,000 others were arrested and incarcerated in concentration camps located on German territory.

On May 10, 1940, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and France were invaded by Germany and once again, we found ourselves living under Nazi rule.

Manfred's Last Letter

DURING THE NAZI OCCUPATION OF BELGIUM, the mail played an essential role in my family's life. Letters were practically the only means for members of my family who were living in hiding to keep in touch with each other. The receipt of a letter signified the writer was safe, at least at the time it was mailed or handed over to a non-Jewish person for mailing.

I was still too young to have learned how to read and write, but my sister, Rosi, and brother, Mani, my elders by nine and eight years respectively, corresponded with our parents and other relatives also living in hiding in Belgium. Fortunately, many of their letters have been preserved in my family. Most were written in French although a smaller number are in either Flemish or German. Recently, at the request of some of the post-World War II generation of our family, Mani and I have translated the ones in French into English so that they can read them. Until then, I had only skimmed some of them. It turns out they contain a great deal of information about my family during that period. They also elicit new questions for which there are no answers because the letter-writers are no longer alive—some murdered during the war, others having died subsequently.

Before the war, we lived in Berlin where my parents had emigrated from Poland following World War I. My mother's brother Abram Horowicz, his wife Gutsha, and their two children lived around the corner from us. Their son, Manfred, was Rosi's age and their daughter Lotti (a nickname for Charlotte) was two years younger. Manfred and Mani, born a year apart, became best friends. The two families were very close.

The two families left Germany separately and crossed the border illegally into Belgium before that country was invaded by Germany in May 1940. The Belgian authorities allowed us to stay in the country along with thousands of other Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria. By then, the latter had been annexed into the Third Reich.

In September 1942, when the German occupiers started rounding up and deporting entire Jewish families, we went into hiding. Manfred and Mani wrote to each other. Both were moved around to different locations by an underground organization in search of safer hiding places. For a while, Manfred, aged 16, and Mani, aged 15, were hiding in the same home for convalescent boys in the countryside. They were unexpectedly forced to leave this location when German troops moved in looking for Belgian resistance fighters operating in that area.

The 19 Jewish boys hiding among a total of around 100 boys were taken to stay temporarily with l'abbé Joseph André, a priest who worked with the underground finding hiding places for Jewish children. While waiting for l'abbé André to find a safe place for him, Manfred decided to go stay with his parents in their hiding place in Brussels. Meanwhile, Mani was placed with a Belgian couple who lived in Huy. At this time, Manfred and Mani resumed their correspondence. Only the letters written by Manfred survived. Due to the censorship in effect at the time, they had to be careful not to reveal their real names, their location, their religion, or anything that might attract attention from the occupiers or their Belgian collaborators.

Mani went by the name “Marcel,” and Manfred was “Alfred.” Thus, Manfred started his last letter to Mani:

Dear Marcel,

Like last time, I'm starting this letter before your mother comes because your mother is always in a hurry and that does not give me enough time to write everything.

I promised you in my previous letter that I would write some jokes and I'm keeping my promise.

Manfred doesn't start his letter with the date because he knows it's not going to be mailed until the day my mother comes to his family's apartment. From Manfred's letters, Mani and I learned that our mother visited her brother's family, apparently on a regular basis bringing and taking mail with her. Despite her blond hair and blue eyes, even brief excursions in public were extremely dangerous for our mother who didn't know more than a few words of either French or Flemish, the two national languages of Belgium. However, we now face an enigma: What was our mother's motivation for risking being arrested by the Germans or denounced by their Belgian collaborators by visiting her brother's family on a regular basis?

Following the first paragraph, Manfred wrote several pages of jokes—18 in all—most in French and a few in Flemish. This is followed by a request that Mani send him jokes before adding one more:

And now . . . have you already heard about the latest invention in new weapons? No?

It is a tank with a crew of 40 men. Think about it: 40 men for one tank! That's fantastic, isn't it? You'd like to know what these men do in one tank? OK, so listen now: I driver, 2 men for the cannons and the machine guns, I observer, I radio operator and the remaining 35 men?

Well, they all get behind the tank to push it (because it does not work on its own, you know!) Did you get it?

I remember having heard this joke shortly before the liberation of Brussels at age seven, without really understanding it. It's a humorous reference to the German war effort, which by the summer of 1944 was perceived by the populations of the occupied countries as failing to hold back the Allied forces. It reflects a new kind of optimism that the war will be over soon with the defeat of Germany.

At this point in his letter, Manfred writes in the date: July 9, 1944. He acknowledges having received Mani's letter dated July 7, 1944, but he doesn't mention how the letter got to him. Did my mother bring it or did it come another way? In any case, Manfred expresses delight at the fact that Mani has built a working crystal radio receiver based on the detailed instructions Manfred wrote in his previous letter dated July 1, 1944. Almost from the beginning of the occupation, Jews were required to turn in their radios to the German authorities. Although undependable and also illegal, crystal radio receivers made it possible to listen to uncensored news about the Allied war efforts via the French language broadcasts of the BBC.

Manfred writes that he regrets he is unable to lend Mani his headphones because he left them together with his crystal receiver with someone in the village (presumably where the convalescent home was located), as suggested by his father "who doesn't want that thing in the apartment."

In conclusion, Manfred writes that Mani's letter gave him a great deal of pleasure; he also reminds Mani to write every week.

Next to his signature, Manfred repeated the date: July 9, 1944. That was the last letter Mani received from Manfred.

Four days later, he and his parents were picked up at their apartment by the Gestapo and taken to the Dossin Barracks, a transit camp between Brussels and Antwerp. The last transport to leave Belgium bound for Auschwitz departed from there on July 31, 1944. Manfred, his father, and his mother were onboard that cattle car train.

On September 4, 1944, barely five and a half weeks later, Brussels was liberated by Allied troops. As soon as my mother obtained permission to travel from the Allied Forces, she and Mani went to pick up Manfred's sister Lotti from the small Belgian village where she had stayed with the mayor's family. Having survived Auschwitz and a death march to a concentration camp in Germany, Aunt Gutsha showed up unannounced at our house several months after the liberation of Brussels. She had learned through the Red Cross that her daughter, Lotti, was living with my family.

Sadly, Uncle Abram and Manfred did not come back.

The War Is Over (Or Is It Ever?)

IN 1955, FOUR YEARS AFTER MY FAMILY'S ARRIVAL IN THE UNITED STATES FROM BELGIUM, I graduated from Garfield High School in Seattle. Although the student population was extremely diverse culturally, religiously, and racially, during my time there I felt like an outsider—even after I became fluent in English and made new friends.

Sometime during my senior year in high school, representatives from the University of Washington, which is in Seattle, came to our school to pre-register students who planned to attend that institution. The forms we were asked to fill out instructed us to choose a major. I had no idea what I wanted to study. In fact, I hadn't even been planning to go to college. I thought I would attend a post-secondary technical school, but my mother had told me that would be a pity because almost all of my friends intended to go to university.

A few years earlier, my sister had dated a Boeing engineer who had told me that when I was old enough to drive, he would help me build my own car. In the meantime, she had married a New York jeweler. Although the engineer boyfriend was no longer part of our lives, when I felt under pressure to select a major, the only thing I could think of was engineering.

Shortly before the fall quarter started, together with some of my friends, I went to the University of Washington School of Arts and Sciences to sign up for classes. I was told that they did not have my preregistration file. After a period of confusion, I was told to go to the School of Engineering. To my surprise, my file was there.

Classes started, and almost immediately I felt miserable. With Boeing the principal employer in the region, engineering was a very popular field, especially among male freshmen. Some of the lecture classes were extremely large; the School of Engineering used these courses to weed out students. I felt lost in these classes, and I also had an ongoing battle in the chemistry lab; my pipettes kept breaking whenever I tried to insert them into the rubber corks.

I was halfway through the winter quarter before I found a way out: joining the army! Military service was required for all able-bodied young men. My brother had been drafted and served in Korea during the Korean War. By this time, we were not involved in any war, so it seemed like a good idea to get my military service out of the way. Joining the army would also allow me to withdraw officially from my classes even though the withdrawal period was over.

I went to my draft board to volunteer to join the army, and I was sent to have a medical exam. A team of doctors examined me along with other young men. Blood was drawn, and we were given a receptacle to provide a urine sample. We were then told to get dressed and wait in the waiting room. One by one, the other draftees and volunteers were given reports and dismissed. I was one of the last to remain in the waiting room.

Finally, one of the doctors approached me. “Are you Harry Markowicz?” he asked. I replied in the affirmative, and he said, “I’m sorry, we can’t take you in the army. You have albumin in your urine.” He also advised me to see my own doctor and to tell him about the albumin. The news came as a shock—I had to return to my classes because I didn’t have a legitimate excuse to withdraw! Fortunately, I was able to finish my classes with passing grades.

By the spring quarter, I had learned that in the School of Arts and Sciences you could choose to be a pre-major and take just the classes that interested you. The only required courses were freshman English classes. Based on a test of English grammar, I was exempted from taking the first class. The second course entailed reading and class discussions of short stories, which I enjoyed; however, writing was a real challenge because I started revising compulsively as soon as I got a few words, at most a sentence or two, on the paper. This obsession to get it “just right” felt necessary to avoid a critical judgment by the reader.

When it was time to register for the following quarter, I met with my advisor, Mr. Otis, who may have been a graduate student. I explained my problem with writing. He saw in my records that my early schooling had taken place in Belgium. He replied, “Writing is taught very well in Belgium. I don’t think that’s your problem.” He suggested that I make an appointment at the student counseling center.

At the center, I was directed to a room where two individuals met me—a man and a woman. They told me to talk about myself. I asked what they wanted to know. They suggested I start with my childhood. I had never spoken to anyone about my childhood, not even within my own family. I had barely started telling the two counselors that I was born in Berlin in 1937, that my family was Jewish, and that I lived in hiding during the Nazi occupation of Belgium, when to my surprise, I felt tears running down my cheeks.

The counselors informed me that I would benefit from long-term therapy but that the student counseling center did not provide such a service. I would have to see a psychiatrist on the outside. I told my parents about the recommendation, but they didn’t think I needed to see a psychiatrist because I wasn’t “crazy.” I agreed with them.

More than two decades later, after I had moved to the Washington, DC, area, a friend told me she was seeing a very nice Jewish psychiatrist. I thought I would give it a try and I started meeting Dr. P. for weekly sessions. One of the issues that came up regularly was my ongoing struggle with writing. At that time, I worked in the Linguistics Research Laboratory at Gallaudet College (later to become Gallaudet University), and I had authored or coauthored more than a dozen academic articles in professional journals concerning the role of American Sign Language in the American Deaf Community. However, every piece of writing—whether a memo to my department or a letter of reference for one of my students—remained a challenge and a source of anxiety.

During one of my sessions with Dr. P., he leaned in closer to me as if to emphasize what he was going to say. “It does not matter whether you use this particular word or a different one,” he said. I wanted to tell him that it was important to me; I needed to get the right words to be clear and unambiguous to the reader. Before I could say anything, he added, “Harry, the war is over!” This comment was completely unexpected. My eyes started tearing up, and I felt that his words had connected directly with a painful aspect of my childhood.

As a child between the ages of five and seven, I had a secret identity; my survival depended on passing for someone else. Was my name Harry or Henry? Could I tell a boy in the Catholic school we attended that I was Jewish like him, or did I need to keep it a secret from him too? Was it all right for me to pee in the urinals in the courtyard at school if no other boys were around, or should I wait until after school when I was back home with my surrogate parents? What was I supposed to do when I unexpectedly saw my mother walking toward me in the street? Should I greet her, or did I have to pretend I didn’t know her? (I took the cue from my mother; she ignored me as our paths crossed.)

So many difficult decisions for a boy my age about what to do or not to do, what to say or not to say, without knowing the consequences of these choices except that the wrong choice could lead to some unimaginable punishment for all those who were closest to me. The safest thing was to do or say nothing. More than 70 years later, I can still hear a voice whispering in my head: “Keep your eyes down; don’t attract attention.”

Yes, the war was over; however, inside I was still that child in hiding.

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A Letter to Olivia

December 25, 2018

Alfred Münzer

Alfred Münzer was born in November 1941 in The Hague, Netherlands. He survived the Holocaust because an Indonesian family living in the Netherlands rescued him.

Dear Olivia,

Last month I met your dad at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, VA. He was in the audience when I gave a talk about my family's experience during the Holocaust. It was the first time he heard an account by an actual survivor of that terrible chapter in the world's history. Afterwards he came up to me with tears in his eyes and said, "I am a young father and have a one-year-old daughter. Who will tell her your story when she grows up?" He then asked whether I would write a letter to you that you could read when you are old enough to understand the history and the lessons of the Holocaust that I shared that evening.

The Holocaust, as you may have learned in school by now, refers to the persecution and murder of six million Jews by the Nazis and their collaborators between 1933 to 1945, but there were millions of other victims too. I told the audience at Old Dominion University that I could not possibly tell the story of what happened to all six million people. That is a story better told by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC. All I could do, I explained, was to tell the story of one small family. And that story multiplied millions of times over, I said, would give them an understanding of what the Holocaust was all about. It's not a pretty story, dear Olivia, but one that is important to learn if we are ever to have a world where all people live in harmony.

My parents were born in Eastern Europe and came to the Netherlands—sometimes called Holland—to escape antisemitism and to seek greater economic opportunities. They were married in The Hague in December 1932, just as Adolf Hitler came to power in nearby Germany, bringing with him his Nazi racist ideology that especially targeted Jews. But in Holland where Jews had lived for hundreds of years, my parents felt secure, and in July 1936 they celebrated the birth of my sister Eva and in November 1938, the birth of my sister Leah.

But then, Olivia, early in the morning on May 14, 1940, my parents listened to the radio and heard that the Dutch port city of Rotterdam had been bombed by German planes and a few minutes later they heard Queen Wilhelmina announce that Holland had surrendered. My parents knew the terrible restrictions that had been placed on Jews in Germany and in other countries that Germany had invaded, and they began to fear for their lives and the lives of my sisters. And indeed, within a matter of days Jews were forced to take a new middle name, Israel for men and Sara for women, so they could always be identified as Jews. They had to register all their property so it could more easily be taken from them. And they were even forbidden from using public transportation or going into public parks.

Early in 1941, my mom found out that she was pregnant again. Her doctor ordered her to have an abortion. But in reading the biblical story of Hannah, a woman who was desperate to have a child, my mother decided against terminating the pregnancy. Her doctor fired her as a patient, and as a result, I was born at home with the help of a nurse on November 23, 1941. By the time I was nine months old, in August 1942, Jews were being rounded up and sent to concentration camps. Like many other Jewish families and like the family of Anne Frank, whose diary you may have read, my parents decided that we should go into hiding. My sisters Eva and Leah were placed with a devout Catholic woman, and I was taken in by a neighbor of my parents, Annie Madna. My parents then went into hiding in a hospital, my father pretending to be a patient and my mother a nurse.

Annie Madna had had some bad run-ins with the Nazi occupiers and was afraid that her house might be searched and that I might be discovered. She therefore passed me on to her 27-year-old sister, Yorina. But after three weeks, Yorina too got scared because she had a neighbor who turned out to be a member of the Dutch Nazi Party. Annie then handed me over to her former husband, Tolé Madna, a man born in what was a Dutch colony, Indonesia. Tolé Madna now became my father and the three Madna children, Wil, Dewie, and Robby, my sisters and brother. And it was their Indonesian nanny, Mima Saïna, who became my mother. Mima came from a very poor background and could not read or write and did not speak Dutch, only the Indonesian language. But she had a heart of gold and cared for me as if I were her baby. I slept in her bed and she kept a knife under her pillow to fight off any Nazi who might try to get me.

The Madna family and Mima risked their lives by agreeing to hide me from the Nazis. They also had to share whatever food they had with me. Food was severely rationed, and every food item they bought required a coupon, and there were no coupons for me since I was in the home illegally. A few years ago, I met a woman in Holland who told me, to my surprise, that I used to drink her milk. She then explained that during the war years young children were given a small bottle of milk every day in school and that her mother had told her to save half the little bottle for



Alfred Münzer with members of the Madna family, 1944. *Courtesy of Alfred Münzer*

the baby next door. I was that baby. You see, Olivia, even a young girl maybe eight or nine was encouraged to do whatever she could to save a human life!

The few memories I have of being with the Madna family are happy ones. I wasn't allowed to leave the house or even go near a window for fear that someone might spot a strange white child in a family that was dark-skinned. My only view of the outside world was what I could see through a mail slot in the front door. From time

to time I had to hide in a closet because the house was being searched. But that wasn't so bad because I played with the Christmas decorations that were stored there. What I remember most was Papa—that is what I called Tolé Madna for the rest of his life—playing the piano and Mima singing an Indonesian lullaby. My favorite private space was to sit in the knee-hole of Papa's desk. The only bad memory I have is of being very hungry which must have been the last winter of the war when one of the few things left to eat in Holland were ground up tulip bulbs. You may have seen pictures of Holland's beautiful tulip fields, but I am sure you never imagined their bulbs could possibly be edible!

While I was with the Madna family my parents were discovered and taken from the hospital where they were hiding and sent to a series of concentration camps, first in Holland and then to Auschwitz in Poland where they were separated. My mom was sent on to a camp where she performed slave labor in an electronics factory. After that factory was bombed by the Allies who were fighting the Nazis, Mom was sent on what was later called a "death march" because so many of the prisoners died of starvation and disease or were shot along the way, to a series of other camps. Fortunately, she survived the death march and was liberated early in 1945 at the Danish border.

In August 1945, I was three-and-a-half years old and was finally reunited with my mother. But I had no memory of her and to me she was a complete stranger. All I remember of that first meeting, Olivia, is that I had been asleep and cranky and was carried into the living room and passed from lap to lap but refused to sit in my mother's lap and kept pushing her away. But after a short while I came to understand that that strange woman was my mom who loved me dearly.



Alfred Münzer between his sisters, Eva to his right and Leah to his left, 1942. Courtesy of Alfred Münzer

Sadly, Olivia, my sisters did not survive the Holocaust. The husband of the woman who had agreed to hide them from the Nazis, reported his wife to the Nazis for hiding two Jewish children. His wife was sent to prison but was eventually freed. But my sisters were sent to the Auschwitz death camp where they were killed. Eva was only eight and Leah was only six. Altogether 1.5 million children were killed by the Nazis.

My dad too did not survive. After Auschwitz and several other concentration camps, he was taken to Ebensee, a camp located in one of the most beautiful spots in Austria—maybe your parents will take you to an old movie called *The Sound of Music*, which was filmed in that area, to see what it was like—where he worked in an abandoned underground salt mine assembling rockets for the German Army without ever being allowed to see daylight and almost without food. He survived long enough to be liberated by the US Army but was so weak that he passed away two months later and was buried in the concentration camp, which is now a huge cemetery.

The story of my family, dear Olivia, brought tears to the eyes of your dad and no doubt will make you sad. But I reminded your dad, and also want you to remember that even when there was so much evil, there were people willing to stand up and do what is right, like the family that saved my life. Annie, Yorina, Tolé, and Mima risked their lives to save a nine-month-old Jewish baby, making it possible many, many years later for that Jewish baby to become a doctor and eventually to become acquainted with your dad and to write this letter at his request.

I hope, dear Olivia, that you will never be confronted with the choice the family who saved me had to make. But there will be times when you may hear hateful words being said about people of a different religion or of a different race or who speak a different language. And I hope that you will then remember the story of my family and the terrible consequences when hate goes unanswered. Don't ever go along with people who hate others and always look for ways to tell them what you learned from this letter. I hope you will share the letter with your friends and classmates. All of us working together can make sure something like the Holocaust never happens again.

I wish you all the best, dear Olivia! And please say hello for me to your mom and dad.

Alfred Münzer

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Impressions of Contemporary Polish Jewish Life

Halina Yasharoff Peabody

Halina (Litman) Yasharoff Peabody, born in Krakow, Poland, survived the war with her mother and sister by posing as Catholics using false papers bought from a priest.

ON OCTOBER 14, 2018, I ATTENDED THE GENERATION AFTER FALL TEA at Beth El Synagogue in Bethesda. The speaker was Emanuel Thorne, professor of Economics at Brooklyn College. He represented Generation After on a “unique” study trip in June 2018 sponsored by the Polish Embassy in Washington, DC. He shared his impressions of contemporary Polish Jewish life, the complex issues emerging, his experiences with the Jewish and Polish leadership, and future prospects. He told the audience that he was impressed with the various Jewish activities in present-day Poland and overall friendly atmosphere toward the Jews.

The Polish government believes that the Poles were victims just as the Jews were, and the Germans are the only culprits in killing 3 million Jews in Poland, without Polish collusion.

I was a child when World War II started in September 1939 and wish to document the incidents that I witnessed as a 13-year-old, after the Germans lost the war and left Poland. These incidents were a continuation of the experiences that occurred during the occupation, but without the Germans.

On the last days of the war, a bomb exploded over our house and I was wounded and taken to the hospital in Jarosław. I was happy that we were no longer occupied, and the first thing I wanted to do was to say my real name. My mother, sister, and I were under assumed identities as Catholics. But I was warned by Mother that I couldn't reveal my real name because it was not safe. There was a pogrom (anti-Jewish riot), and Jews who came out of hiding were often murdered by the Poles.

Our place was completely destroyed by the bomb, and a neighbor took in my mother and sister. She told my mother that she was only sorry about one thing: that Hitler didn't finish his job (meaning that there were some Jews who had survived). My sister, who was only five years old and did not know she was Jewish, was asked by neighbors: “You can say now that you are Jewish, right?” And my sister, who thought she was Catholic, said: “Look at me, do I have horns, do I have a tail?”

When we tracked down my father, who had been a prisoner in Russia, he immediately arranged for us to leave Poland. This meant that we had to move to Krakow where the Jewish Agency operated. We had to get lodgings and wait until arrangements could be made. When we tried to rent a room, we were asked if we were Polish (meaning not Jewish). We had to say yes and keep the false identities again.

Eventually, we were housed with a group of other survivors in Szczecin from where we were to be driven across the border into Germany. The arrangement, agreed to by the Russians, was that a few of us were taken by a truck, and with a couple of bottles of vodka, we bribed the guards, one Polish and one Russian, and they let us through the border. We were then put on a train to Berlin. One night before it was our turn, the Polish *Milicja* (“Citizens’ Militia”) tried to raid our house and we stood and screamed for hours to get attention, before they finally left.

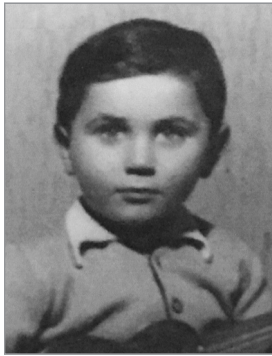
This was the situation in which we left Poland. Since then, I have visited there: on the 50th commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, and for the March of the Living to visit Auschwitz and other camps, to honor the people we lost. It is very painful to visit your childhood home where we were part of a small few who survived. I visited the Polish Embassy in Washington a few times during the previous administration and hoped that with education, the next generation would be able to learn that some of their grandparents did not always help the Jews, but rather helped the Germans. Otherwise, how could three million Jews have been murdered on Polish soil?

Hearing the professor, who had been wine and dined by the Polish government, say that the relations between the Poles and Jews today are so good unnerved me. The government showed the visitor only what they wanted him to see to demonstrate how they love the Jews, but they do not mention Polish collusion during the Holocaust. This omission sends the wrong message to people who have not lived in Poland and do not know the dark side. They do not wish to teach young people the truth so the history gets distorted.

I know there were some Polish people who helped Jews at the risk of their own lives, and I am thankful for that. But that is only part of the story.

The Germans who were the perpetrators acknowledged, apologized, and keep apologizing—as they should—for what was done. The Poles do not.

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People Have Choices

George Salamon

George Salamon was born in Budapest, Hungary, in 1942. In order to avoid deportation, he and his mother moved between houses protected by the Swiss government until they were liberated.

THE MUSEUM HAS THE MOTTO “WHAT YOU DO MATTERS,” AND IT IS SO TRUE.

Everybody makes decisions and acts all the time. Decisions are important, naturally some more so than others.

The actions of people with great power and political position affect more people, but everybody's actions count.

But the decisions and actions of people become much more important in troubling times.

As is well known, Hungary was an ally of Germany in World War II. When the Hungarian leader Miklós Horthy realized that Germany was losing the war, he started negotiations with Britain and the Soviet Union. This decision and action was fatal for Hungarian Jewry. The Germans occupied Hungary, and the deportations to killing camps, mostly to Auschwitz, began quickly. The Germans also helped the Hungarian Nazi Party, the Arrow Cross, to attain power. They had a significant role in the killings. In all, more than 560,000 Hungarian Jews died in the Holocaust.

At that time, Carl Lutz, the Swiss vice consul, and Raoul Wallenberg, a Swedish diplomat working on behalf of the United States War Refugee Board, made the decision to help the Hungarian Jews. They both saved tens of thousands of people. They gave out protective passports and established safe houses, declaring them under their country's protection. They both issued more passports than had been permitted by the Germans. They also gave out false ones. My father-in-law could draw very well. He forged German signatures for Lutz.

Neither the Swedish nor the Swiss governments were involved in the rescue missions. Wallenberg and Lutz executed their own decisions because of their humanity.

The actions of Lutz saved my mother, grandmother, two uncles, an aunt, and me.

Though many Hungarians were German collaborators and most of them bystanders, there were some people who helped. My mother waited in a long line to get the papers for our immediate family from the Swiss embassy. But the two hours when Jews were allowed to be on the street was not enough.

So she stayed after the curfew. The police got her. But one of the policemen told her: "Just go."

With these two words, he saved her and our family, because she had gotten the papers and we could move to a safe house. Later, she paid a policeman to get my grandmother out of the ghetto.

My wife's father was hidden by a man in a mine. I only know his name as Janos. That happened in a Hungarian town called Eger.

My wife's mother and grandmother were hidden by someone in a restaurant. He was hiding Jews and soldiers who deserted. I only know his name as Lajos.

From time to time the Hungarian Nazis came to safe houses and rounded up people. They took them to the river Danube, where they shot them and they fell into the river. One of the Nazis came to my mother and told her to go back to the house with the child (me). He did not have to do that, but he did, and saved our lives.

On the other hand, another time the Hungarian Nazis came to the house and gathered the Hungarian Jewish men to march to Austria to perform forced labor. My grandfather was home but had ignored the knock at the door. In Budapest, every house had the so-called housemaster, someone who took care of the house. The housemaster saw that my grandfather was absent from the roundup and sent one of my aunts to get him. He did not have to do it, but he did. This action caused my grandfather's death, because he was murdered during that forced march. My aunt blamed herself, thinking that if she had not called him, he would have survived. Most likely it would have not made any difference, and her refusal would have gotten her in trouble.

I have to talk about my uncles Herman and Sanyi. Both of them had escaped from forced labor. Uncle Herman became the safe house's representative and was in touch with the Swiss embassy. One day, the Swiss embassy notified Uncle Herman that he was in danger, so he and his wife moved to the "glass house," protected by the Swiss embassy. He was the one who arranged for my mother and me to move to the "glass house" as well. My Uncle Sanyi was the one who came to the safe house one night, risking his own life, to bring my mother and me to the "glass house." The guard let me in, but he did not let my mother in, saying that the house was too crowded.

Uncle Sanyi pushed her in, moving the guard to the side. Since my mother was inside the building, which was Swiss territory, she could stay. With this action my uncle saved my mother and made an enormous impact on my life.

After Germany occupied Denmark, the Danish prime minister, Erik Scavenius, threatened to resign if the Germans persecuted Danish Jews. His attitude reflected the actions of most of the Danish people. When they learned that the Germans would go ahead with the deportations anyway, they sent the Jews by boat to safety in Sweden.

Sweden accepted them.

Even those Jews who didn't have money could get a loan for the trip. The Danes made a list of everybody's possessions, so they could give them back when the Jews returned.

How different that was from what happened in Poland and Hungary. The Polish people had pogroms (anti-Jewish riots)—when Jews returned, they killed them. A relative of mine entrusted her valuables to a family friend. When she returned and asked for her belongings, they killed her and her child, who was still in a baby carriage. There is a Hungarian movie that came out in 2017 called *1945*. It shows two Hungarian Jews coming to a village after the war. The whole village becomes anxious, worrying about what these people want. Do they want to reclaim their property? Do they want vengeance?

Those who helped were extraordinary people. Many times they risked their lives and often those of their family.

There is an important question. How did it happen that the most technically advanced, most cultured people, became mass murderers?

Unfortunately it is easy to brainwash people. When people lose their individuality and become a part of a machine driven by ideology, there is trouble.

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Obligations

Esther Rosenfeld Starobin

Esther Rosenfeld Starobin was born in Adelsheim, Germany, and survived the war in England where she was sent by her parents on the Kindertransport in June 1939.

MY SISTER BERTL WAS ALWAYS PRESENT IN MY LIFE. Bertl was the person who guided our siblings and me to become a strong, cohesive family. She was opinionated and had a clear vision of what was right and wrong. Maybe it was her German birth. But she is gone now, as are my other three siblings. So, I ask myself, what are my obligations to keep the family strong and resilient?

My parents, through their strong beliefs in God and in other people, saved all five of their children from the Holocaust. My sisters—Bertl, Edith, and Ruth—and I were all sent on the Kindertransport to England when I was only two years old. From their letters, I know my parents truly expected family and others to step in and look after us. My aunt Hannah had immigrated earlier to London. Working as a maid, she knew many people and found separate homes for my three sisters. My parents were thankful and appreciative. A placement for me was found by the Quakers.

My brother had been deported to France with my parents and was in an *Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants* home, but when the opportunity arose for my brother to come to the United States, my father signed the necessary papers to allow it. Despite the hardships my parents suffered, family was important to them. Our parents looked forward to being with us again. Of course, this didn't happen. Clearly, our inheritance from them is to prioritize family.

Through the years, many family members have written something about these experiences. My daughter in 1990 wrote a poem containing the lines:

For years these stories stayed hidden—
Suppressed.
The past in Germany could not exist.
Questions appeared forbidden.
The cousins believed we would never hear
Stories of the children who are now our aunts.

Many years later, my older grandson, who was eight at the time, wrote in a book, “the only sound was the crying of children. It was around 1939, the kids were on the Kindertransport from Germany to England.”

These writings were followed years later by articles written by a niece describing her visit to Auschwitz with her mother, my sister Ruth: “Standing under the wrought-iron sign, I was several years older than my grandmother had been at her death. She was murdered as the mother of a nine-year-old son and four daughters, while I’d been privileged to watch my own sons grow to adulthood.” Tamar has gone on to write other articles about her mother, trips to hear my First Person interview at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and visits to the exhibitions there.

Some of the next generation, my parents’ great-grandchildren, have visited Adelsheim, Germany, my birthplace, and shared their impressions. Their visits have been informed by dedicated research and preservation by a German man, Reinhart Lochmann. One grandnephew talks about the incredible debt owed to Reinhart for what “he has uncovered about my family’s history in Germany before and after the Holocaust.” In a long article about his trip with his family to Adelsheim, another great-grandson wrote: “Until I saw that list, Adolf and Katie Rosenfeld were just names and stern faces frozen into the figures I’d seen on the single surviving photograph. Now, I was reading the complete list of everything they ever owned, and walking past their house, and visiting the site of their synagogue, and seeing their parents’ gravestones in the old Jewish cemetery. I’d connected with a history I didn’t realize was missing.” My grandniece’s husband wrote of visiting my sister Bertl’s birthplace. Reinhart, during this visit, showed Bertl’s daughter and her family pictures of her school and her classmates. We have learned so much about my parents’ life in Adelsheim and Korb through his dedication.

Finally, I want to share lines from a poem written by Ruth’s granddaughter about the Kindertransport:

I am now with my family in England
But things here are not too grand
I was split up from my sister
I really miss her
I feel like an unwanted guest . . .

Even this week, one of my grandnieces was interviewing me to learn about my father and grandfather's religious practices and how they affected my religious practices. This question reminded me of how little of the real life of my family we know. It is clear from these snippets of writing and questioning that my family's connection to the Holocaust is important to our extended family.

Last weekend, I was out with one of my nieces and I asked her what she thought my responsibility is as the remaining child of my parents. Her reply was that my role is to dispense the family history. But will that be enough to continue as a strong, connected family? I certainly try to do that even though, as the youngest, I remember nothing about life in Germany or my parents. I have learned a lot over the years as has my family, but it is research-based for the most part. As a visitor said to me when I was volunteering at the Museum, there are voids in what I know. But it is certainly true, I am keeper of the family factual history as related to my parents, their siblings, and the Holocaust. I do preserve this story through speaking and writing at the Museum.

Bertl's persistence and love made a family that my parents would also have loved. I strongly believe that passing down the history that keeps our family connected is even more important. My question is who in the next generation will be the catalyst for the family? Is there a continuing obligation to my parents to make sure the family is strong? If so, is there something that I need to do to ensure that happens? It is the future that is important. It is only through the family closeness and contact that can I share our family history.

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Britain's Response

Alfred Traum

Alfred (Freddie) Traum was born in Vienna, Austria, in 1929. In June 1939, he and his older sister were sent to England on the Kindertransport. Their parents were murdered in the Holocaust.

BRITAIN'S RESPONSE TO THE MASS VIOLENCE AGAINST JEWS ON KRISTALLNACHT

(the "Night of Broken Glass") on November 9-10, 1938, was to offer a safe haven to children at risk living under the Nazi yoke, and thus the Kindertransport program was born. By the time World War II broke out on September 1, 1939, approximately 10,000 children had arrived in Britain via the Kindertransport program. In many cases, parents made that heart-wrenching decision to send their children away without knowing if they would ever be reunited. But by taking that step, the parents saved their children's lives.

By 1946, it became clear that the majority of these children, in many cases now young adults, were orphaned; their families had been murdered by the Nazis. They had neither homes nor families to which to return, and in addition, most were stateless. The British government made a second humanitarian gesture: it offered full citizenship to these children. All that was necessary was one's signature of acceptance, and one became a fully fledged citizen of the United Kingdom, with all the benefits and obligations that entailed. I happily exchanged my "Enemy Alien Identity Card" for a British passport. A passport that was welcomed throughout the world.

As for the obligations, for 18-year-old males, one became eligible to be conscripted for military service. That was something I had looked forward to. Most of my friends who were older than me were already serving in one of the branches of the military. About a month after my 18th birthday, I received my call-up papers. I reported to the Selective Service Office in Manchester where I, and many others, received a thorough physical exam given by a team of doctors and a psychologist just to make certain there were no other issues to be taken into account before being classified A1 and fit to serve. I qualified, was given an A1 grade, told to go home, and in due course I would be notified as to where and when to report.

However, on May 14, 1948, everything changed for me. The State of Israel was declared and was immediately attacked by the five surrounding Arab countries: Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt. At first the Arabs had the upper hand. In the area now referred to as the West Bank,

Arab forces attacked kibbutz Kfar Etzion and, after the defenders surrendered, massacred all but four, 128 in all. Seven hundred thousand Palestinian Arabs fled or were expelled as the fighting progressed. Approximately 850,000 Jews, who had lived in Arab lands from time immemorial, fled or were evacuated or expelled, and became homeless. But for the first time in Jewish history they did not wander aimlessly, but had a place to go and be welcomed: ISRAEL. In less than two years, they were settled and became part of Israeli society. What had actually taken place was an exchange of populations. I was torn by the thought that I would be joining the British Army, which was not under any threat, when I should actually be joining the Israeli Army, which was under attack. I agonized over this for some time and finally decided to volunteer and make my way to Israel. Through the Zionist youth organization, I learned that there was a clandestine recruiting system in place and soon found myself en route to Israel with a stop in Marseilles, where we waited for a ship that would take us. I met up with a small group of volunteers from Leeds, England. They were considerably older and had all served in the British Army during World War II. Eventually, an Israeli ship, the *Kedmah*, took us on and, together with about 300 DPs (displaced persons who were Holocaust survivors), we departed for Israel.

The pundits that filled the airwaves gave Israel little chance of survival, considering that the Arab states had a population of close to 200 million with well-equipped armies, and Israel's entire population was approximately 600,000 men, women, and children with no formal military. However, there were many Israelis who had fought alongside British forces during the war and were well-seasoned soldiers even though their number was small. Both Britain and the United States had an arms embargo against Israel. The situation looked very grim. On arrival in Israel, my British traveling companions were quickly deployed.

There was a battalion comprised mostly from English speaking countries, who had all served in World War II. But they didn't know what to do with me, since I was young and inexperienced. They asked what I had done in England. I told them I had worked in a radio repair shop. They lit up as though I had just handed them a million dollars. Apparently a shipment of "walkie-talkie" radios had been received, but needed work before they could be distributed among the troops. I was sent to a former British Army camp and there, together with one other Israeli fellow, tackled a mountain of surplus radio equipment, gradually managing to get some working and handing them over to the military.

But a modern miracle occurred. One that would more than match anything from biblical times. About 4,000 volunteers from Britain, the United States, South Africa, and Canada came to Israel, and among them were seasoned fighter pilots, bomber pilots, and many others with military expertise who were quickly deployed. And of all countries in the world, Czechoslovakia became the military hardware superstore, and readily sold Israel much-needed hardware, including

Messerschmitt 109 fighter planes, Spandau machine guns, ammunition, bombs, and small arms. Three B-17 Flying Fortresses were somehow spirited out of the United States, purchased in Panama, and flown to Czechoslovakia, where they were quickly loaded up with much-needed arms and flown to Israel. Even though Israel suffered dearly and there is hardly a family that did not experience a casualty in their immediate or extended family, gradually, and much to the world's astonishment, the tide of the war began to turn in favor of Israel. By the latter part of 1949, a truce was arranged by the UN, establishing the boundaries that even to date are known as the much-disputed 1949 border.

Most of the volunteers were demobilized, and many made their way back to their home countries. I was handed a flight ticket that would take me to Amsterdam, and from there I would have to make my way back home. Although I wanted to make Israel my home, I felt that I had first to return and fulfill my obligation to serve in the British Army. I did not know anyone who had been in a similar situation as I faced and therefore had no idea of what might be waiting for me. While I was standing outside the volunteer office with the flight ticket in my hand, a fellow I once met in Manchester walked by. We chatted for a short while, and I asked him what he did there. He told me that he worked for ZIM, the Israeli shipping company, as a radio officer on one of their ships. Suddenly I saw my future. That brief encounter changed my life. And I never regretted it.

Maiden Voyage

FRIDAY, THE DAY OF DEPARTURE FOR OUR MAIDEN VOYAGE, had finally arrived. By 10 a.m. passengers began to embark, a very different and diverse group from those who had joined us in Gibraltar. For the most part, they were holiday makers or returning tourists. Hundreds of them, with bright smiling faces, walked up the wide gangway to be welcomed aboard by the purser's representative. Before entering the ship they all turned back to give a quick wave to family or friends who had come to see them off on their journey. There appeared to be quite a number of American students returning home. They congregated in clusters on the decks and lounges excitedly comparing notes of their experiences while in Israel. Also noticeable were some of the older passengers, whose demeanor was that of anxious anticipation, possibly contemplating their reunion with long-lost relatives who had survived the war and made their way to the United States. The composition of the passengers had all the indications of what would turn out to be an interesting two weeks ahead of us. By mid-afternoon we were ready to sail. It looked as though all of Haifa had turned out to wish us *bon voyage*. The ships in the harbor gave their salutations as we slipped out of the harbor into the open sea.

Even for the officers and crew, the Friday night dinner was both special and traditional. Wine and freshly baked *challah* bread was placed on the tables. Several crew members recited the appropriate blessings ushering in the Sabbath. Aside from that, for the crew, the Sabbath was just another day, seagoing duties continued as usual. We partook of the evening meal in several stages to fit in with watch-keeping duties. The hustle and bustle of Haifa port, with all the preparations prior to sailing, was far behind us and we could look forward to two glorious peaceful weeks ahead of us. Well, at the very least, that's what I was banking on.

Our next port of call was Palma de Majorca, a small and beautiful island off the coast of Spain. Chopin spent the last days of his life there, and his former residence had become a mecca for tourists. For most of the crew, it was the first time in Palma, and just like excited tourists, we took in as much of the island as time allowed. A wondrous peaceful spot, the best of Spanish foods, fine wine, and the warmth of the Mediterranean sunshine.

After crossing the narrows of Gibraltar, we entered the Atlantic. Almost immediately a cold blast of air hit us as though a gigantic door that had been left open. The Atlantic swell could be felt, even though by all standards, the ocean was calm. But it was a brief respite—the calm before the storm. Dark clouds gathered. The weather forecast predicted heavy seas with winds gusting up to gale force six. A time to batten down the hatches, lash deck chairs together and make them secure and check the decks for loose items that could be washed overboard. Passengers were advised to stay inside, and an itinerary of indoor activities was announced.

Some passengers were already beginning to play it safe and headed for the infirmary, where Nurse Clara was distributing Dramamine tablets along with words of friendly advice.

After several days, although the weather had not let up, many passengers became used to the motion and found their sea legs. Still others spent most of their time secure in their cabins, and with the exception of rare occasions, avoided the dining room and had their cabin steward bring them some nourishment. Gradually the wind abated its anger, and the waters calmed down. Shipboard life returned to normal. The dining rooms were full, and so were the lounges in the evenings. Film shows were well-attended and nightly dancing in the bars continued. But, even with that, the occasional couple found themselves sliding uncontrollably across the dance floor, far in excess of what their dancing flair had called for.

The voyage continued uneventfully. The weather brightened and passengers, welcoming the change in weather, lounged on deck chairs soaking up the warm sunshine. Stewards, skillfully balancing trays of refreshments while weaving in between the deck chairs, delivered drinks with grace

and a smile. Much to the regret of some of the children, it was still too cool for swimming and the small pool was covered for safety.

As though equipped with a “bridge-partner-seeking radar” enthusiastic bridge players found each other, and small groups were speedily established, as was a hierarchy in the proficiency as a bridge player. To the casual observer, such as myself, one could easily distinguish between the groups, from the tense, fiercely competitive demeanor to those who appeared to be actually enjoying themselves. Max, the second Engineer, an avid bridge player, soon found his partners. When off duty he could often be found in the Jonah Bar, engaged in serious battles of the mind. I was amazed at their power of concentration as they sat for hours, stone-faced, not giving away clues to the opposing team players. One would think their lives were at stake. The Jonah Bar was a coffee and soft drink lounge. In addition to several bridge players it was a convenient hang-out for the teenagers.

Four a.m, the end of my watch, and I was anxious to take in a deep taste of New York air before catching a couple hours of shut-eye. Several hours later we would be docking, and I would experience my first impressions of that rich and famous city that has been an attraction for so many millions. I knew that this would be a day to remember.

After a short rest and a hearty breakfast I returned to the upper deck. It was still early, about 7:30 in the morning. Some of the New York Harbor immigration officials had come aboard with the pilot's launch and were already going through their administrative work. A section of the dining room would serve as immigration and passport control for all new arrivals.

The New York Harbor pilot had taken his place on the bridge, navigating the ship through the tricky waters of the New York Harbor.

The deck crew had prepared the ship for our grand entry. The ship was fully dressed. Flags attached to halyards ran from stem to stern via the top of the mast; a most magnificent and colorful sight. The ship itself, gleamed white, with the exception of the funnel markings of two blue bands spaced apart with seven gold colored stars between the bands, representing the seven seas. Conforming to standard protocol, high above and attached to the mast, fluttered the Star Spangled Banner, —a courtesy on entering the United States—and slightly below flew the Israeli flag.

Two helicopters buzzed overhead and began circling the ship at a safe distance. They were part of our welcoming entourage. Soon they were joined by two harbor water barges sailing off the port and starboard sides, sending up plumes of water high into the sky like two immense water fountains escorting us. It was all part of our grand entrance into New York Harbor. As a passenger ship on its maiden voyage, we were accorded the customary welcome for such an occasion. Ships in the harbor

offered their welcoming salute by giving three long blasts of their ship's horn. Our ship, the SS *Zion*, acknowledged with one short blast. With so many ships in the harbor joining the salutations it became a quite noisy, but wondrous affair.

As the morning wore on, passengers were slowly being processed by immigration officials in the main dining hall. Those who had been processed were eagerly roaming the decks scanning the skylines, picking out famous landmarks. The Statue of Liberty stood off in the distance but had come within eyesight. A most dramatic and emotional sight, especially for those among our passengers who were immigrants to a whole new life in the United States.

We had a number of dignitaries among our passengers who normally commanded and presumably received special attention. Some strutted around on deck like peacocks full of self-importance, but on this special occasion even they had to take second place to that of the ship. This was the SS *Zion's* day and no one could take that away. As we came closer to the harbor, the ship's orchestra positioned themselves on deck and played Hebrew and American music appropriate for such an occasion. Many passengers joined in singing along to the music; "Hevenu Shalom Alechem" and "America the Beautiful" to name just a few. As we approached the Manhattan Bridge, we noticed hundreds of people lining the bridge, frantically waving their arms and shouting welcomes to us. Next we sailed under the Brooklyn Bridge, where more well-wishers had lined the bridge, some waving small Israeli flags and shouting to us in English and in Hebrew. By that time, the water barges had left us and were replaced by regular tugs that would assist in docking. We headed for Green Point Pier in Brooklyn, where we would dock.

My parents were not fortunate to live to see this day. They had perished in the Holocaust, but they were very much in my thoughts at that time. They, having witnessed the worst of humanity, of what one people could do to one another, could not in their wildest dreams have imagined the scene unfolding before me. An Israeli ship, a Jewish ship, with an Israeli crew, a ship built in Germany under the reparation program, and their son, a crew member, an officer aboard that ship, receiving such an enthusiastic welcome from the greatest country in the world. How could the world have changed so much in so few years? It's hard to fathom, but it had. What a profound contrast from 17 years earlier in June of 1939 when a downcast little boy of ten bid his parents good-bye for the last time, never to see them again, and with his sister, left Nazi-occupied Vienna for freedom and hope of a new life in England.

The whole voyage—and especially the arrival in New York, an unbelievable and an emotional event—will remain with me as a high point of my life.



Another View of a Survivor

Susan Warsinger

Susan (Hilsenrath) Warsinger was born in Bad Kreuznach, Germany. She escaped with her brother and was smuggled into France before leaving for the United States in 1941.

THE SURVIVORS WHO VOLUNTEER AT THE UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM were notified about a new project to help younger audiences relate to us and I thought it was a fine idea. We were told that members of the Museum's marketing team had conceptualized a new video series. They envisioned a casual video conversation with us, focusing on parts of our life beyond the Holocaust, "something you are passionate about—a hobby, a moment in your career, or events or experiences that show a more complete view of who you are as people, as individuals."

The Survivor Affairs Department sent us an email asking us to list our passions, career choice, hobbies, and life experiences. Here is my list: birding all over the world, bicycle riding, swimming, reading (I've belonged to the same book club for more than 60 years), classical music, opera, yoga, exercising, and dancing. I also stated that staying connected with my children and grandchildren at celebrations, weddings, graduations, birthdays, and in person or through phone, emails, texts, and Instagram was very important to me.

The video team and I decided to concentrate on my yoga life as another view of me besides my volunteering at the Museum. The team explained to me that the project was called "Next Chapter" and that the videos would be on the Museum's social media channels (Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, including on a Monday for #MondayMotivation). I would be interviewed at my home and then we would continue to film at my yoga class. I was happy with the choice because Jane Chente Wu Adams, my yoga teacher, has her own studio, and I have known her for many years. She knows all the muscles and bones in our body and how they are connected. Jane has a deep understanding of all her students' physical needs. I was almost positive that she would allow the video crew to invade the studio.

After Jane thought about my request for a few days, she graciously agreed to the plan. She moved some of the yoga equipment into her office and massage room so that there would be enough space for the crew and their assistants. I felt grateful that this expert yoga teacher went to a great deal

of effort to make everything perfect for the filming. She stated, “I want this to happen to honor your life.”

Friday, November 30, 2018, was the day of the significant event. The video crew arrived at my home at 8:30 in the morning. My living room and dining room were filled with people and camera equipment. They all knew where to place everything because I had been asked to email pictures of my living room earlier.

Before the interview, I was given an idea of the questions and was told they would ask why yoga is important to me. I made a list of topics to talk about. Here is the list: muscle strength and tone, vitality, balance, energy, feeling loose and flexible, makes my spine nice and straight, good exercise, contributes to a positive outlook on life, increases body awareness, and gives me a connection between my body, mind, and soul. I like the aspect of being with my teacher and the people with whom I practice. It has a permanent place in my health and fitness program, and it enhances my life and makes me happy. How do I connect yoga with my Museum work?

Here is my list: walking from the Metro to the Museum even when the weather is freezing cold and the wind is raging; gives me energy to conduct tours of the Permanent Exhibition for two

and a half hours without sitting down; maintains my vitality to go on trips to talk about my experiences during the Holocaust to audiences in different parts of the United States and provides my mind and soul fulfillment because I know how important my work is here in the Museum where I help our audiences understand what hatred and prejudice can do to people and that we cannot be onlookers when we see injustice taking place. It makes me happy that I have the opportunity to educate young people and help them understand that we need to be sensitive to each other, realize all that humankind has in common, and that we need to take care of each other.



Susan Warsinger practices yoga while being filmed for a Museum video series.

The interview took about an hour. Everybody helped put my living room back in order before we all drove in separate cars to the yoga class. The camera people set up all their equipment again. Jane was well prepared to teach our poses and I appreciated all the effort she had put forth

to make this event successful. I think the class was quietly very excited to be filmed while we were practicing. It lasted for an hour, and I was wondering how many minutes of this time would be used to make the video. The photographer asked me to pose for numerous photos.

One of the pictures was posted on the Museum's social media on Monday, January 7, 2019. The #MondayMotivation showed that there were 2,060 likes and 33 comments. I also received calls from friends to let me know that they saw it on Instagram. There is a caption under my photo which states that "the 89-year-old survivor volunteer Susan Warsinger travels around the country for the Museum to share her Holocaust experience." The Instagram also quotes me as saying, "Yoga makes me feel ready to face the world. I think yoga has a very important part in my being able to do all of the activities that I'm involved in at the Museum."

I am not sure how I feel about everybody knowing how old I am. I feel as I did 30 years ago. I do not feel like I have "one foot in the grave." I am not going to give in and be old. I recognize that I do not have much of my life ahead of me, but I know that the life I have lived has been a dazzling journey.

My Favorite Language

MY FIRST LANGUAGE, MY MOTHER TONGUE, WAS GERMAN. As a young girl living in Bad Kreuznach, Germany, I spoke only German with my parents and my friends. I attended first grade in the German public school shortly after the Nazis came into power. My teacher read *Der Giftpilz* (*The Poisonous Mushroom*) and the children made fun of me because I was Jewish. By 1938, I heard a considerable amount of Nazi propaganda on the radio and all around me. Therefore, the German language was something that I came to fear. It was uncomfortable for me to hear it even as an adult, far away from Germany, safe from past experiences. My family did not speak German here in the United States because we wanted to become Americans and learn English so that no one would make fun of us. When people spoke to me in German, I always answered in English. My vocabulary and reading level at the present time in that language is not much higher than *Aschenputtel* (Cinderella) and other fairy tales. Now, in the autumn of my life, I feel that it is about time that I toss away this aversion to my mother tongue, though it is still difficult.

French was my second language. I had to learn it quickly after I was torn away from my parents and smuggled into Paris in 1939. I had to learn it quickly in order to survive in the French elementary school that I attended in the outskirts of Paris. After the Nazis invaded the northern part of France and I moved to the "unoccupied zone," I became even more skilled in speaking and writing. I thought that I was very fluent in French for a ten-year-old girl. Over the years I have

forgotten much of it, and it takes great concentration on my part to recall my knowledge of French.

The language that I love is American English. For me, as an 11-year-old girl coming to the United States, that language meant being reunited with my parents, freedom from the Nazis, and living in a democracy. I loved the sound of it. It has given me the opportunity to express who I am. It is the language in which my husband courted me with beautiful words. It is the language I used to read picture books to my children when they were little. They never had enough of *Goodnight Moon*, *Babar the Elephant*, *Madeline*, *One Morning in Maine*, and so many others. It is the language with which my first daughter, Lisa, named her first doll “honey,” the same word I used to call my husband. It is the language in which I patiently taught my three daughters to communicate with the world and helped them grow, become good students, and caring human beings. It is the language in which I can express my deepest feelings to those who are important to me. It is the language in which I tell my nine grandchildren that I love them and they in turn tell me about their love for me. It is the language that keeps growing and for which our new generation of adults find contemporary and innovative words. My grandchildren happily teach me these new words that are foreign to me. A few years ago, Brian, my second grandchild, said to me, “Grandma, I am good,” which, I learned, does not mean that his behavior is good or that he is a good person, but that he is happy with the situation that he is in. “I am good” with the English language.

At the present time, I hear the loss of civility in dialogues between opposing views of some of the citizens here in the United States. I hear our political leaders using offensive and unbecoming words. My second daughter, Meryl, tells me that “not only are American leaders using terrible words but unfortunately so are the music industry, movies, and TV. I wish our language would remain as beautiful as it was when we were growing up.” I agree with my daughter and hope that this deterioration changes soon and that we will be kind to each other in our communication.

My third daughter, Terese, reminds me of how my father always said to us that he, “loved us and liked us” and how he called us *dalink*. These words came deeply from his heart, and we knew how important we were to him. I understand that our language will be changing and that we cannot go back to the way it was but look forward to us being “good” with American English again.

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Democracy Shattered

Martin Weiss

Martin Weiss was born in Polana, Czechoslovakia, and survived Auschwitz-Birkenau and Mauthausen. He was liberated by US troops at the Gunskirchen camp in Austria in 1945.

WHEN I CAME TO THE UNITED STATES, I WAS 16 YEARS OLD, and I went religiously to night school, anxious to learn everything about my new adopted country such as the language, the Bill of Rights, etc. Mrs. Durst, my teacher, was a very nice person and a good teacher. She stressed the greatness of the Constitution and the “Four Freedoms.” As time went on, she suggested I read the *New York Times* to improve my language skills. By that time, I spoke four languages and was able to read and write in all of them.

I was in grade school in Czechoslovakia in the 1930s and we had “democracy” as well. Our schools were similar to those in the United States. My older brothers and sisters visited the cities, and my older sister Cilia was going to college in the city of Mukachevo (Munkács in Hungarian). I also picked up a lot from those who traveled from Budapest and other places to visit the summer resort in our town. So, when I was ten years old, I knew about democracy.

But in March 1939, our world shattered forever. Germany declared war and invaded Czechoslovakia. The state I lived in was called Carpathian Russ (Carpathian Russ). The Hungarians allied themselves with the Germans so they occupied our state. Our lives were changed immediately. Cilia was thrown out of school because she was Jewish. And that was only the beginning. In a short time, Jewish professionals lost their jobs, and Jewish-owned businesses were given to Hungarians. For some unknown reason, our family’s meat distribution business was not confiscated, but the government did not give us an allotment of livestock for our business. Meanwhile, Cilia was able to negotiate a contract with the Hungarian Army to supply them with meat for the troops that were stationed in our town. This created a problem as they were not allowed to buy from a Jewish vendor for fear we might poison them. So, father made a deal with the Hungarian butcher who sold pork only. We would do all the work for a share of the profit and would use his name on the billing.

We had to buy the cattle from the farmers in secret, and we had to slaughter during the night around 1 or 2 a.m. in a dark stable by candlelight. I would hold the candles and my older brother

prepared the steer for the kosher ritual slaughterer. Sadly, we couldn't even trust our Russian neighbors who hated Hungarians, which is why we had to be extra careful. Another thing that could have made life more difficult for us is that the police had a cook and she shopped for meat in our store. My father gave her a big discount to keep our relations intact. Often when the detectives would be ready to spy on us, the cook would warn us.

My two older brothers, like all Jewish men from 20 to 45 years old, were drafted into labor battalions where they performed manual labor, such as cutting down the trees in the forests so the partisans could not hide there. My oldest brother, Mendel, was stationed in Hungary most of the time. In 1945, when the Russians were advancing into Hungary, the Hungarians took thousands of these Jewish men on a forced march into Austria. When Mendel and some friends realized their predicament, they decided to escape. They were all young and handsome and they befriended some German girls who helped them to survive until they made it back home. By then, the Russians had occupied the Carpathian area.

Few men attempted escape. If someone was missing in the morning, the Hungarians would count one to ten and shoot every tenth person. My cousin Jack was on the same march as Mendel, but he ended up in Gunskirchen concentration camp, where I ended up as well, having survived a death march from Mauthausen to Gunskirchen. Our march was horrific. Our rations consisted of a palm full of mildewed bread crumbs and a cup of warm water made from sugar beets that was used for the cattle. Many men didn't have the energy to walk, so they fell down and the guard would shoot them. We would continue marching. One incident I will never forget was marching on a country road and noticing a potato on the ground. Two men leapt for it and started to fight over the potato. The guard simply raised his rifle and shot one man in the face; his jaw just dropped away. This guard grew up in one of the most advanced cultures in Europe. I still find this behavior hard to fathom.

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Echoes of Memory

Volume 12



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